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THE SHERIFF OF THE BEECH FORK

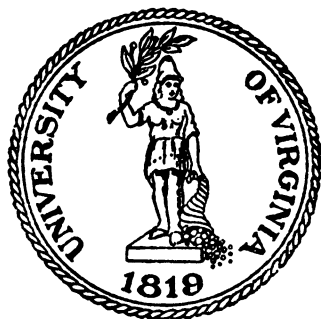


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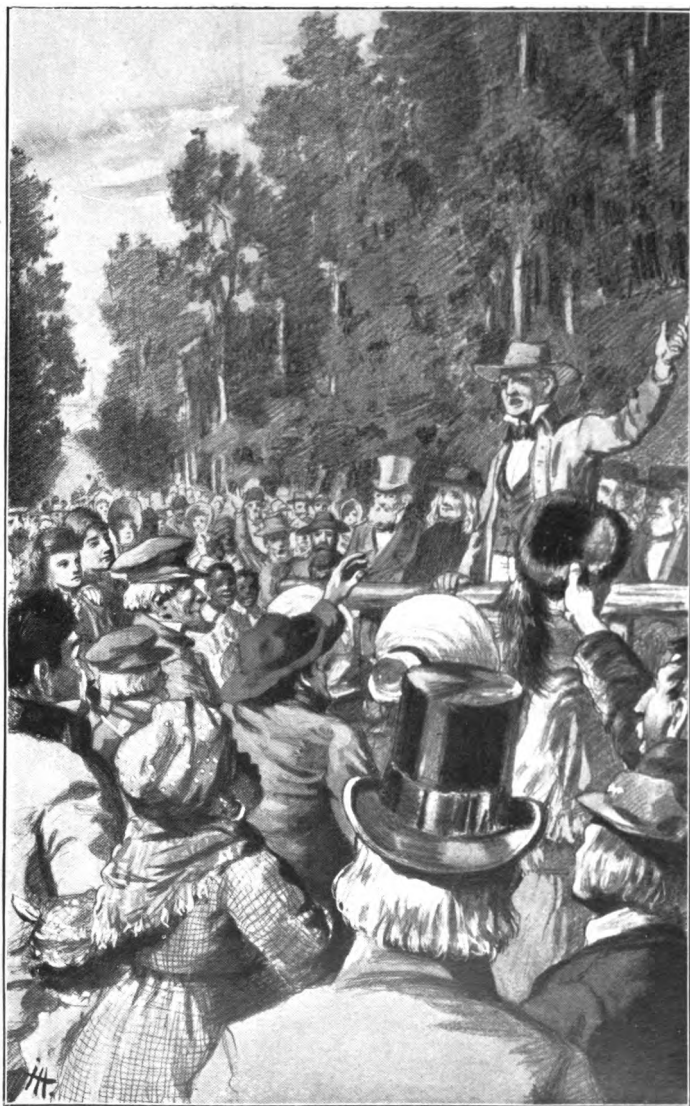
PRESENTED BY

MISS MARY B. PROFFIT

P. C. Hammer.

1905

The Sheriff of the Beech Fork



"He began his speech before the noise had subsided."—Page 215.

The SHERIFF *of the* BEECH FORK

A STORY OF KENTUCKY



BY
HENRY S. SPALDING, S.J.

Author of
"The Cave by the Beech Fork"

THIRD EDITION

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The Sheriff of the Beech Fork

CHAPTER I.

THE BEES IN THE POPLARS.

NORTH Central Kentucky, near the banks of the Beech Fork River, May the twenty-third of the year eighteen hundred and fifteen.

The poplar trees were in bloom. They were not as numerous as the oaks and hickories, but grew in patches here and there or extended in narrow belts of yellow, clayish soil, avoiding alike the dry ridges of the hills and knobs, and the damp valleys along the creeks and rivers. What huge giants they were: their trunks, rising with undiminished girths of eighteen feet to the height of other trees, put forth their cumbrous branches, shutting out the genial sunbeams and dwarfing the smaller growth of the forest!

The poplar trees were in bloom. Their creamy, waxen, tulip-shaped flowers, rivalling in beauty and in richness the magnolias' petals, distilled the sweetest honey. What a glorious harvest-time for bees! Lured hither from the

meadows and hemp-fields, they did not fly from blossom to blossom to gather their tiny burdens, for a single cup was so filled with nectar that a score of the busy little laborers could not exhaust the supply. The honey ever dripped from the delicate, bell-shaped calyx and trickled down the leaves of light olive-green. To the high bowers, too, came the bee-martins gliding in among the foliage and enjoying a plentiful repast on their unsuspecting victims. Ceaseless there the buzz and whirl of bee and bird.

The poplar trees were in bloom. One of them stood isolated from its companions and grew close to the Howard Manor. Unlike the other trees, this one was gnarled and twisted, and put forth its branches but a few feet from the ground. It even protruded its drooping limbs beneath the porch and mingled its fragrance with the sweet odors of a wild honey-suckle which ran along the lattice work. Although it was past noon, the day still wore the freshness of matin time. For many hours the rain had fallen unremittingly; but now at last the sun burst through a rift in the clouds, and the morning-glories opened their eyes and thought that it was the awakening of day.

On the porch sat Mrs. Zachary Howard. She was one of those refined, comfortable, elderly ladies, who retained much of the old colonial air in dress and manners, for her life, although not an idle one, had been spared the toil and drudgery which were, alas! too often the lot of the wives of Western settlers. In maidenhood

she had been called the most beautiful girl in Southern Maryland; and, though age had tempered the sparkling glance of the eye and given a gentle expression to the whole face, it had not stolen the charms of early days. In her hand she held a short frock or jacket which she turned and examined with evident satisfaction; then, as she busily plied her needle she paused occasionally to glance down a narrow path which led to the river. It was a labor of love which engaged her attention; and her thoughts went out to him for whom she worked, to Owen, her son, who was soon to leave her for a trip to New Orleans. She felt the separation keenly, for only two of her children were left to her,—the babies she called them, although Bertha, the youngest, was in her fifteenth year. As she sewed she listened to the bees among the branches and caught the blended scent of the poplar blossoms and the honey-suckle; but her thoughts were divided between the absent children and the son who was soon to depart.

“Hurrah for the raft! It will be finished before night!” came the cry as Owen appeared in the path which led up from the river. His voice rang out clear and musical, and the mother gazed at him with evident joy and satisfaction. He was a tall, wiry, active lad, with alert, gray eyes beaming from sharp and regular features; his fox-skin cap tossed back upon his head revealed a high forehead and a rather luxuriant growth of seal-brown hair. He was clad in jacket and trousers of home-spun jeans.

"Your coat will be finished too; come try it on, son," was the gentle reply of the mother as the lad came near.

"The raft draws just five inches,"—as he spoke, down went the arms into the sleeves of the jacket.

"Don't be so rough, the sleeves are only basted," remonstrated the mother playfully.

"It will be a busy day to-morrow," continued Owen, who was all excitement, and had half a dozen things to tell. "Father wants me to ride over and hurry up Mr. Brent; he is always late with his old oxen. Then it's about time for Uncle Marion to tell us whether or not Martin is going. But, mother, you should hear Mose; they are still teasing him about the alligators eating him if he comes along with us—he is 'gibbin' in and 'gibbin' in; but he won't give in for the trip—one of the other negroes has been telling him the most wonderful stories about alligators and has frightened him to death."

"I have made the coat a trifle larger, for you are growing so very fast," interrupted the mother.

"Oh! I can fill it out," and the lad expanded his breast and threw back his shoulders until the bastings began to break.

"That will do; I see that it is none too large," acknowledged the mother, as she removed the jacket and resumed her seat.

"I'm a big man now, for only men go on long trips to New Orleans; besides didn't I beat the biggest man in the State at the shooting-match! But, mother, you've been crying!" The boy's voice changed to one of sym-

pathetic love, and stooping he kissed the moistened cheek.

"Yes, son; I was thinking of your leaving me!"

"But, mother, I'll be back in a short time."

"I trust that your guardian angel will bring you back in safety; but when I thought of you my mind went back to your brother and sisters in Maryland. Everything was so quiet and beautiful as I sat here, and before I was aware of it the tears rolled down my cheeks."

Owen stood for a moment with his head bowed, not knowing what to answer.

"There is the stage!" he shouted as he heard the deep call of the driver's horn far up the road. To free himself from the embarrassing situation he sprang from the porch, ran across the yard, and with the nimbleness of a wildcat mounted the stile-block to await the coming of the lumbering coach.

CHAPTER II.

KENTUCKY HOSPITALITY.

THE arrival of the stage was an event in the history of the Howard family, for it disturbed the wonted quiet of the place, and brought letters and news from the East, and long-expected packages from Bardstown and Louisville. It was customary, too, to invite the travelers, although total strangers, to alight for a few minutes and partake of refreshments prepared for the occasion. In fact they needed no invitation, as the driver always discoursed so eloquently of the cordial reception given at the Howard's to his patrons that the cramped and weary occupants of the coach regarded this stop as an essential part of their journey.

Owen saw the passengers craning their necks through the narrow door and recognized the features of Squire Grundy, who was entertaining the travelers and talking vociferously; still, as he stood there high above the road, the boy did not imagine that he was the object of the Squire's eulogies and of the passengers' special attention and admiration.

His name had been a household word in the state since the last shooting-match, when he not only won

the prize but made a record such as had not been equaled in the history of Kentucky marksmanship. On that occasion Squire Grundy, who was judge of the contest tried to rule him out as too young to enter the lists, but when the youthful competitor came off victorious the Squire not only became his ardent admirer but seemed to consider it his duty to herald the praises of the little hero. "Ladies and gentlemen," said the dignified Squire as the stage drew up before the manor and the passengers alighted, "this is Owen Howard, Owen Howard. I reckon you have all heard of him, many and many a time, long before this! Owen Howard, Owen Howard; the same that beat Coon-Hollow Jim and Jolly Jerry and all the rest of them last November at the shooting-match. I was judge on that occasion and encouraged the young man to try his luck. Owen Howard, Owen Howard!"

Owen shook hands with the strangers feeling at the same time somewhat abashed by the Squire's doubtful flatteries.

"Good morning, Squire, good morning," came the familiar voice of Zachary Howard, a tall, loose-jointed individual, well on in the fifties, who, as he spoke, briskly rubbed his short, black whiskers with his left hand.

"Why Zach," said the Squire pompously; "Good morning, good morning. I was just telling these ladies and gentlemen about Owen and the shooting-match, and how I encouraged the young man to take part in it."

"And we were much obliged to you for your kindness," answered the farmer, not wishing to allude to the unpleasant part which the Squire had taken in trying to exclude his son. He scarcely waited for an introduction to the travelers, but received them as if they had been friends of long standing, inviting them to the house to partake of refreshments and making them feel at once that they were most welcome at the Howard Manor.

"How's your health, Zach? how's your health?" continued the Squire walking by the side of the host.

"Tol'ably well."

"And Mrs. Howard?"

"She's tol'ably well."

"And the children?"

"Tol'ably well."

"And old Aunt Margaret?"

"She's tol'ably well, thank you."

"And Uncle Pius, the dear faithful soul, how is he?"

"Oh, he's tol'ably well, too; tol'ably well."

And the farmer was glad to hear that the travelers were all tol'ably well and that they were enjoying their ride tol'ably well, and it was a tol'ably fine day, and everybody was happy.

The strangers now walked slowly toward the house, which stood about thirty yards from the road and faced it at an angle. The Howard Manor was an object of curiosity to all visitors. It was a spacious log structure consisting of two separate parts joined together by a porch, each division being of the same dimension and

having the second story one-half the size of the ground floor. The roof was high and pointed, and covered with long shingles of white oak.

"A right smart house you have, Mr. Howard," said a corpulent woman, the wife of Squire Grundy.

"I reckon we've added a little to it since you were here," replied the farmer.

"That was long on a coon's age. I am so very, very fat that I don't leave home often. But there is Bertha! the dear sweet child!" and Mrs. Grundy folded to her maternal arms the blushing girl who had come to meet the guests.

Mrs. Howard, who had remained within to prepare refreshments, also appeared, and with a bland smile shook hands with each of the passengers. Aunt Margaret, the old colored cook, was all astir; dogs were barking, roosters crowing, and hens cackling,—and there was an unwonted commotion within and without the Howard household.

The company was scarcely seated at the table on the porch when the Squire's wife uttered a cry of mingled surprise and admiration and wobbled into the house. "Land sakes alive!" she exclaimed; "a new carpet! a brand-new carpet! and such nice yellow streaks in it!"

"Aunt Margaret just finished it," answered Bertha, who had followed the visitor into the room.

"Awful nice!" continued the enthusiastic admirer.

The old negress who was in the kitchen near by smiled when she heard these words of praise.

"She can make a fine carpet," added Bertha.

"Land sakes, I reckon she can!"

Aunt Margaret left the stove and crept close to the door. "That yellow won't fade; it is dyed with the branches of young willow trees," said the girl.

"And such nice yellow. Did Aunt Margaret dye it?"

"'Deed I did. I done it all!" came the reply as a black face appeared at the door.

The visitor forgot the refreshments and stayed to examine everything within the room.

There was an air of neatness and refinement seldom found among the Western settlers,—the carpeted floor, the walls and ceilings spotlessly white, the large windows opening east and west to admit the cheerful sunbeams, the huge fire-place holding back-logs which two men could scarcely carry. Her attention was attracted, too, by the number of pictures which adorned the walls; there hung a portrait of Queen Mary, the wife of Charles the Second of England, after whom Maryland was named; there was a rough oil painting of Lord Baltimore, and one of some old English abbey, and a crude pen sketch of two sailing vessels beneath which were the names of the Ark and the Dove. All these were heir-looms in the Howard family, and had been brought with several articles of furniture from the old home in Maryland.

On the porch there was a clatter of tongues and general hilarity among the guests, with the exception of one individual, who was silent and apart from the others.

"Who is that gentlemen with the white whiskers?" asked Farmer Howard of the Squire.

"Cyrus Appleway 's his name."

"I reckon that he hasn't said a word since he left the stage."

"Scarcely spoke on the way from Louisville."

"Where's he going?"

"That's more than I can tell you, Zach."

Cyrus Appleway glanced at the two speakers as if conscious of the fact that he was the subject of their conversation. He was large and muscular, but so well proportioned that only the close observer would have noticed his Herculean build. A long beard partly concealed a deep, red scar in his right cheek; his forehead was high and broad, and except for his small, squinting eyes he would have been a man of commanding appearance.

"Is it true that you are going to send a flat-boat to New Orleans this late in the season?" inquired the Squire, changing the subject of conversation and slightly raising his voice.

"I reckon we'll try it, Squire; Lane is making a raft he thinks will pass the rapids."

"So it is a raft; the folks down our way said it was a boat."

"Just betwixt and between; sometimes we call it a raft, sometimes an ark and sometimes a boat. Lane tells most folks it's a boat."

Here the Squire turned to the guests and informed

them that the man referred to was no other than Richard Lane, commonly called Coon-Hollow Jim, who had been for years the champion marksman of the state, but had lost the prize in the last contest to their young host, Master Owen Howard. The Squire began to repeat the story of Owen's victory, but was interrupted by the father, who did not think it good for his son to be praised so extravagantly, especially in the presence of strangers.

After finishing the repast the guests were invited to the river to see the strange boat which Richard Lane was building, as also to make the acquaintance of that famous personage, for to his rifle-craft he added the enviable distinction of being the largest man in the state. As Mrs. Grundy was too fleshy to climb the steep river bank she remained with Bertha, and much to the amusement of the latter continued her inspection of the Howard Manor.

CHAPTER III.

RICHARD LANE AND HIS CRAFT.

FOR years Richard Lane had led a wandering, shiftless life, passing from one section of the state to another and asking hospitality of friends or of those who admired him for his rifle-craft. During the past three months he had worked for the Howards, where under Owen's instruction he had learned to write and cipher, conning his Wilcox's Arithmetic diligently each day. He was just now engaged in mastering the intricacies of long division.

It was strange news for most Kentuckians when they heard that Coon-Hollow Jim, the giant sharpshooter of the state, had laid aside his rifle for books and that he was soon to be announced as a candidate for Sheriff of Nelson County. All knew him to be a brave man, and now that he had learned to read and write he had the necessary qualification for the office; there was one requirement, however, and an all-important one, that he did not possess,—he was not a public speaker. It was an unheard-of event in the history of the state for anyone to be elected who had not first harangued the public during the campaign. Could Richard Lane meet the

people at the Cross-Roads, win them over by his eloquence, and prove to them that he was just the man to be chosen as Sheriff of Nelson County? He intended to make the attempt and regarded the trip to the South as an excellent opportunity for self-improvement, for he could read during the voyage and learn as many long words as possible so as to impress the country folks; he could speak to the waves and winds like another Demosthenes; but Squire Grundy, and not Demosthenes, was to be his model.

The shipping season had long since passed and not a raft had left the Beech Fork district for the Southern ports, for it was rumored that the English had occupied New Orleans; and even after the news of Jackson's victory came, the farmers were unwilling to run the risk of having their boats and cargoes confiscated by the American soldiers. Mr. Howard resolved to take his chances and to send a heavily laden boat to the Southern port. To carry out his plans, he needed a craft that drew but little water; and even with a shallow vessel it would be impossible to pass the fords unless there was a heavy rainfall during the month of May.

Most of the barges which floated down the Ohio and Mississippi were unwieldy structures, consisting of some dozen logs fastened together with chains or strong oaken beams and wooden spikes; but Mr. Lane's was to be more than a clumsy raft. The timber which he chose for his work was straight and faultless; the logs were of uniform size and length; the soft poplar wood was easily

trimmed and smoothed. Upon this material had he labored for a month, directing his sharp broad-axe with such perfect aim that the surface of the logs presented an even and polished surface.

As they descended the winding path which led to the river the visitors watched the busy craftsman who with powerful strokes was driving the flax caulking between the logs. They reached the wharf near which the raft was moored before Mr. Lane was aware of their presence.

"Good morning, Sheriff," said Squire Grundy in a deep, rich voice which echoed along the river.

With his right hand still grasping his hammer Richard Lane turned, drew himself up to his great height of six feet and four inches and gazed at the crowd. Cyrus Appleway looked at him with a feeling of mingled surprise and jealousy. What a specimen of manhood! He appeared to belong to that generation of warriors long since passed away, who wielded battle-axes which men of our day can scarcely lift. There was an expression akin to childlike simplicity in his round, shaven face; but a closer glance at the firm eyes and compressed lips revealed a strength of character proportioned to the gigantic frame of the old Kentucky marksman.

"Ladies and gentlemen," continued the Squire with great deliberation, "this is Mr. Richard Lane,—or I should say Sheriff Lane, for he has acted as Sheriff two months in place of Mr. George Mudd, and next November he is going to run for the office against Mr. Will Mudd. I have promised him my assistance and he is

sure to win, sure to win! The people of Nelson County will have no one else, no one else! During his short term he captured two stage-robbers, and broke up the famous whisky-cave about seven miles below here, just as I was telling you on the stage. And what is most remarkable of all, the most remarkable thing I ever saw, read, or heard of, was that he dodged the bullet, actually dodged the bullet when one of the robbers fired at him —”

During this incoherent speech and introduction, Mr. Lane passed from one to another of the visitors shaking hands with each without uttering a word, but when the Squire mentioned the incident of the bullet he suddenly interrupted him.

“That part ain’t true, Squire, and I reckon I’ve told you long on fifty times how it happened.”

“We won’t fight about it, Sheriff, we won’t fight about it. We’ve come down to see the wonderful raft!”

As the crowd moved along the narrow wharf or ship-ping-station, as it was called, the Squire whispered to one who was very close that he had actually seen Mr. Lane dodge the bullet and that he intended to bring it up in his favor before the election.

“You will notice that the raft, or ark, or what you want to call it, is made of logs of the same length and thickness,” began the craftsman removing his raccoon-skin cap as a token of respect for his large audience. “There’s jus’ nineteen logs, each forty feet long, leaving room for the sides, which is three inches thick and a foot and a half high. There’ll jus’ be thirty-seven feet

by eighteen for the cargo." As he spoke he twirled his cap with his right hand by the long bushy tail which dangled from the top.

"And why do you make it of logs instead of heavy timber?" asked the Squire.

"Just what I was thinking," put in a certain Zeph Knott, who had constructed rafts on the Green River.

"Otherwise the raft wouldn't be a long one, or a strong one; besides, I couldn't caulk it with tow unless I used logs."

"Got pegs between the logs, I reckon?" queried Knott.

"Eight of them in every log."

"And what keeps the tow from working through at the bottom?"

"Small willer trees running 'long and resting on the pegs."

"And you pack the tow against the willows?"

"Exactly."

"A strange ark; carries a tol'able lot, though. I reckon I'd risk my corn on it, if it was starting from the Green River."

"How much will it draw when loaded?" asked the Squire.

"Long on nine inches."

The man with the white beard had not entered the raft, but remained on the wharf seemingly indifferent to all that was said or done.

"When will the raft be finished?" he inquired of Owen, who just then walked by toward the warehouse.

"To-night, sir, we hope."

"And when will it start?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"So you can load it in one day?"

"Yes, sir; several of the neighbors will help us."

"Who are going on it?"

"Mr. Lane and myself are sure to go. Then I want my cousin, Martin Cooper, to come along. His father is sick and wants him to take care of the farm. If Martin doesn't come, we'll take Mose. He's the colored man you see unloading that corn."

"How long will it take you to reach the Ohio?" resumed the man after a short pause.

"About one day, sir."

"And how long before you pass the Wabash?"

"I'm not quite sure, sir, but I think it is about five or six days."

Another pause.

"It seems to be a very strong raft; I hope you enjoy your trip on it."

"That depends on my getting Martin. He's just my age,—we always hunt and fish together. There he is now," and Owen pointed toward a heavy-set lad of medium height, with sandy, unkempt hair, and a red, freckled face, who drove up to the shipping-station with a load of flax.

"Halloo, Mart!" he shouted. "I was just telling this gentleman that I wouldn't enjoy the trip without you. Are you coming?"

"I reckon so; but you must ride back home with me and talk to father."

"Oh, I'll do that!"

"I guess he'll go with you," were the encouraging words of Mr. Appleway.

"I reckon so," was the response of the Kentucky lad.

"And it will take you five days to reach the Wabash?"

Owen turned and looked into Cyrus Appleway's face. "Are you going that way — going to Vincennes?" he asked.

"Oh, no; I'm on my way to Nashville to join our troops there. I've served as a private for four years at Philadelphia and have just been promoted."

The conversation was interrupted by the call of the driver's horn. Climbing the hill slowly, the passengers stood chatting in groups for fully half an hour before taking their seats. The old coach was not one of those of which we read in story books, where the whip cracks and the horses dash off at full speed. It moved slowly down the rough road, giving the travelers time for many a parting word with their hosts.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST SPIKE.

BERTHA and Owen were standing within the open gate-way, watching the stage as it disappeared down the hill.

"I'm ashamed of you, for you are so very bashful; you scarcely said a word to the visitors," began the former.

"Yes, I am real bashful," acknowledged Owen, at the same time crushing his sister's mob-cap with the pressure of his hand.

"Oh, brother! my new cap! the first time I have worn it!" protested Bertha as she rearranged a fluffy, white muslin cap worn by the young people of that period.

"Yes, I am bashful!"

"Please don't jerk my coif!"

"Yes, yes, I am bashful!"

"Owen, you will tear my fichu!"

"Very bashful indeed!"

"You mean thing; keep your hands off of my curls!"

"What a bashful boy I am!"

"If you break that comb — don't, don't, brother! you know it belonged to grandmother!" The girl wore two

curls in front, pressed against the sides of the head and held by a comb of tortoise-shell.

"How nicely you are dressed to-day — I reckon you are getting ready for a dance."

"It's but polite to dress to receive visitors," argued Bertha.

"And what is the use of those mittens?"

"To keep the hands from being sunburned; but you know that without asking."

"Then let me have them for my hands!" Thus Owen continued to tease his sister and defend himself from her attack. He was a bashful lad and was often chided for taking so little interest in dances and other amusements. His favorite pastime was with the rifle and fishing rod; Bertha was fond of company, and when visitors were expected in the stage she always dressed for the occasion.

"I'm losing time here with you instead of seeing Martin about going with us on the raft," concluded the boy, catching a second time at his sister's curls.

"I wish you were as bold in the company of other girls," affirmed Bertha as she clasped her locks and ran toward the house followed by her brother. A truce was now declared. Owen felt that he had harassed his enemy, without, however, getting the better of the fight.

Bridling his favorite horse, Old Hickory, the boy mounted at a single leap and rode off to the home of his Uncle Marion Cooper; but before he reached the house he met Martin, who had returned from the wharf with

his father's team and was now on his way to consult with Owen.

"It's all settled! I'm going with you!" were Martin's words of greeting.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" and Owen's cap went high into the air. "But how will Uncle Marion run the farm?"

"One of Mr. Medley's negroes is coming over to stay until I get back; besides father is much better. He even hopes to drive over and see us off."

"That'll be fine! as it's all arranged now and we'll have lots of fun on the two big rivers. But tell me, Mart, how did you get the permission?"

"Well, when I met you at the shipping-station I didn't think there was much chance; you remember I asked you to come home with me and talk to father."

"Yes, but our visitors stayed so long that I could not come."

"I saw that, so I didn't wait for you. When I came home mother met me on the porch and said that she had gotten the permission."

"Hurrah for Aunt Vic!" ejaculated Owen. "I wish I had time to go and thank her. I may be over to-morrow. Come along to the river, for the wagons will begin to arrive soon and we can help to unload them."

"What will Mose do?" asked Martin as the two galloped down the road.

"Well, father wanted him to come when he heard that you couldn't go; but the negro would not consent. Old Nic Dates has been telling him the most wonderful

stories about alligators, how they eat not only people, but some of them are large enough to swallow a boat,—and that they are very fond of negroes. Why, you couldn't pull that negro on the raft with a yoke of oxen. Father teases Mose every day and says that he has to go."

"I reckon I'm willing to take his place," replied Martin with a laugh.

On reaching the wharf the two boys informed Mose that his services would not be needed.

"I gib in," exclaimed the negro. "Dem 'ar alligators won't make no brec'fus on dis nigger."

While they were joking with the negro the rumbling of a heavy train was heard in the woods.

"There's the first wagon!" exclaimed Owen.

It proved to be Barnes, bringing four dozen hams and shoulders, three hundred pounds of flax and the whole year's crop of tobacco. Soon afterward Clay Cicil drove up with a load of flax; and before his wagon was emptied Farmers Sims, Gates, and Rapier also arrived, each with a consignment for the raft. Others soon followed. Not even during the busiest shipping season were so many wagons accustomed to gather at the Howard wharf. Everybody, too, was enthusiastic and sanguine over the prospects of success. The farmers had long despaired of selling the products of their fields, so that this sudden change of fortune made them very happy and demonstrative; and they were extravagant in their praises of Mr. Lane's craft.

The captain, who had gone to Audd's shop to secure

some iron spikes, made his appearance in the midst of the general excitement and was greeted with loud cheers. At his invitation all went aboard to inspect the ark. It was strange to see how much he found to explain to his friends and admirers, for it would seem that a glance at so simple a structure should have sufficed to reveal its various parts.

"Have all the men brought their shippings?" asked Owen's father.

"All except neighbor Brent, sir."

"I reckon he stopped on the way to talk to some folks; there's no telling when he will come in that case," put in Timothy Gates.

"And his ox-cart,—will he hold on to it as long as he lives?"

"I reckon he will; he says they use nothing else in Maryland, and it's good enough for him." It may be added that when Mr. Brent arrived with his load of corn the raft was far down the Ohio.

"If I'm anything of a prophet," were the encouraging words of Sims, a tall, gaunt, sinewy man with red whiskers, and one of the most influential personages of the settlement, "that rain we had is going to bring us a rise of four feet."

"I reckon you are right," assented Rapiet.

"Good luck to you and a lucky voyage to the ark. Give my corn to Archambeau, and here is a letter from him." Mr. Gates shook hands with Mr. Lane, climbed into his wagon and drove off. He was soon followed

by the other farmers after they had delivered their various messages and commissions, those who lived near the Howards promising to return early on the following morning to assist in loading the raft.

As evening approached the ark was fast nearing completion. The caulking had been driven between the logs, and the corn-bins put into position, and it only remained to secure the joists of the side of the raft with iron spikes.

To the river came little Robin Woodruff, an adopted orphan boy, assisted by Bertha, who with difficulty prevented him from rolling down the steep bank. Robin was a dear friend of Mr. Lane, the happiest days of his life being spent near the river, where he rode big logs for horses and amused his giant friend with his artless prattle.

"Come, Bob, and drive in the last spike," were the craftsman's words of greeting.

The hammer was placed in the hands of the child, who imagined that he was supporting its entire weight.

"Now hit that spike!"

Down came the hammer, and the raft was finished.

"Mr. Lane," asked Bertha, "are you going to give the raft a name?"

"I reckon you kin name it."

"Then call it the Woodruff," she replied.

"Great pos-sim-mons!" (his favorite expression of surprise) "jus' it—the Woodruff!"

"Hurrah for the Woodruff!" exclaimed all.

Mr. Lane lifted Robin high into the air and at the same time suggested that his little friend have the honor of starting the raft on its trip.

CHAPTER V.

A BUSY DAY AND A DISASTER.

IT was the morning of the busy day—the day for loading the raft—the day before the departure of the Woodruff on its long voyage. Martin rose early and after a hasty breakfast started for the shipping-station, where he expected to find the work of carrying the cargo aboard in full operation. What was his disappointment on beholding half a dozen men grouped around Mr. Lane, who with an iron claw was drawing the tow from a crevice between the logs!

“Bad luck, Mart!” said Owen, leaving the crowd and walking toward the new arrival.

“Raft leak?” asked Martin.

“Yes; in two places.”

“How long will it take Mr. Lane to fix it?”

“I reckon it will be after dinner before we can begin to load.”

“Why don’t the men help?”

“Mr. Lane won’t let any one touch his hammer. He is glad that he found the leak before we loaded the raft, and wants to be sure that nothing will happen a second time. But say, Mart, you can ride over and ask

Mr. Sims to help us, for we'll need all the men we can get to finish loading before night."

"All right, but I'll take a look at our raft before starting."

The two boys parted, Owen visiting Mr. Speed to secure assistance and then returning home to complete his preparations for the voyage.

"You jes' come in heah fur to steal agin," expostulated Aunt Margaret as he made his appearance in the kitchen.

"You are a little cross to-day, Aunt Margaret."

"Cross nuffin', chile; de way you been grabbin' jam an' biskits, an' all sorts ob truck, an' biled hams, I neber seed de like in my bawn days. I s'pose you goin' to dō nuffin' 'cept eat fur de nex' free mon's. I spec' you forgot de salt, you been nosin' 'roun' heah so much fur goodies."

"That's a fact; I did forget the salt."

"De Lawd bless me! who eber heah'd ob de like! cookin' widout salt. I jes' know'd you'd make a botch ob it. An' de pepper?"

"Why I forgot that, too," acknowledged Owen.

"Lan' sake alive!" and Aunt Margaret, with her hands akimbo, shook with laughter.

"But that's all, I've got everything else."

"I kinder spec' you'se forgot de bacon fur to season de taders," and the triumphant cook chuckled as she waited for the boy to acknowledge that he had neglected to provide this necessary ingredient.

But it was now Owen's time to laugh as he said:

"Aunt Margaret, we'd have bacon enough if we sailed for ten years."

As the old negress could find nothing else missing in Owen's list she declared a truce to hostilities, and by way of reconciliation assured the boy that she had prepared for him a tray of biscuits to which she had added a large jar of peach-jam.

"You'll be down to the river after dinner with all the other folks," said Owen when he left the kitchen.

"Spec' I will if I kin jes' hobble down de road."

"Uncle Pius will make himself useful by reading the numbers on the scales."

"I done my part by cookin' dem goodiēs fur you, chile; but I'm comin' down to de ribber, too."

It was past two o'clock before the work of loading the Woodruff began. The graded guage near the shipping-station registered a rise of fifteen inches since breakfast; only a foot and a half was needed to bring the water to the required height.

"I reckon we could start before sunset," said Mr. Howard, pointing to the driftwood which floated near the shore,—an evident sign that the river was still rising.

"Then let it go, Zach," were the warning words of Farmer Sims.

"Why?"

"Because that river may fall soon."

"Doesn't look like it now."

"But you can't risk it so late in the season, for it doesn't stay high a long time."

"I reckon neighbor Sims is correct," put in Farmer Speed. "I'm in favor of starting the boat before sunset."

Zachary Howard glanced toward the warehouse almost bursting with its contents. "Gentlemen," said he, "we can't start that raft after it's dark, and it will be dark before we get it loaded."

"And what if the river is too low in the morning?" came the strong objection of Speed.

"I reckon it can't be helped; this whole venture is something new and we must be prepared to take the consequences."

"Well, Mr. Lane, let us hear your opinion," yelled one of the crowd.

"Down on the Green River I'd hit the bull's-eye every crack," replied the old marksman, "but I don't know nothing 'bout the weather in this part of the country. I reckon we'd better load her and trust to luck."

"The captain is correct," said Farmer Howard. "And now, gentlemen, all hands are needed, for it will be hard work to get the shippings on the raft before dark."

The work began; no one was idle. The men scarcely spoke as they passed to and fro from the wharf, nor did anyone pause to examine the register until the last bushel of corn was within the bursting bins. Then all enjoyed a lunch which Mrs. Howard and Aunt Margaret had thoughtfully provided, and the work was resumed. Before half an hour had passed the meat was stored away; only the flax remained, but as this was the most

bulky portion of the cargo and very difficult to handle, all agreed that it would be past sunset before the task was finished.

Aunt Margaret returned to the house to get supper ready for the workmen, and was soon followed by Mrs. Howard and little Robin. Within the shipping-station could be heard the feeble voice of Uncle Pius reading the numbers upon the steel-yard as each of the carriers placed his load of flax within the forked stakes which hung at one end of the iron bar; without sounded the steady tramp across the swaying plank and the swish of the water against the side of the craft. Scarcely a word was uttered. Unconsciously the men seized larger and heavier loads, and walked with quicker steps, for the sun was sinking rapidly. Close by a speckled thrush sang its twitter, twitter, twitter, twee, twee, twee; a whip-poor-will began its sad evening note,—but no one heard them;—tramp, tramp, tramp over the unsteady plank,—tramp, tramp to the heap of flax which seemed to diminish slowly.

Uncle Pius soon retired and gave his place to Bertha, who, by the light of a tallow candle, read the numbers on the steel-yard and marked them in a faded book, in which was kept the record of every boat starting from the Howard wharf.

No one thought now of measuring the height of the river, for it had risen several inches above the required mark and was still rising rapidly. Every man there was fatigued except Mr. Lane,—powerful giant that he

was, he strode along with his bulky load without being in the least exhausted. Tramp, tramp over the narrow board, but more slowly now for it was difficult to keep one's footing. The thrush was silent but the whip-poor-will sang on. Tramp, tramp more slowly still; — at last the flax was aboard the Woodruff and the day's work was done. The negroes threw themselves upon the floor of the shipping-station to rest, while the others sat outside to enjoy the cool evening breeze. Martin held the candle near the register from which Bertha read the following:

May 24th, 1815.	<i>Cargo of the Woodruff.</i>
Shelled corn	673 bushels.
Bacon	2,558 lbs.
Hams	3,200 lbs.
Shoulders	800 lbs.
Hemp	12,250 lbs.
Tobacco	1,250 lbs.

To the house the laborers trudged, where a plentiful supper awaited them; then with many a good wish for the Woodruff and its crew they took their departure, with the exception of Martin, who remained with Owen. When all were gone Mr. Howard walked down to the river to make a last inspection.

“Halloo! halloo!” he yelled. “The raft’s loose! help! help!”

“Help! help!” repeated Mr. Lane as he jumped to his feet.

Martin and Owen re-echoed the cry of alarm and rushed down the hill.

"I gib in," yelled Mose dashing from the kitchen.

"De Lawd hab mercy on us!" ejaculated Aunt Margaret. Bounce and Frisk barked; and the affrighted chickens cackled and fluttered in the trees near the porch.

Owen reached the river first. "Here I am," said his father, who was standing close to the water about fifty feet below the wharf. "Thank God that I came down—in five minutes the raft would have been gone."

"How—did—it—get—loose?" asked the boy, panting for want of breath.

"Don't know! It was not eight feet from the shore when I saw it. But the skiff was gone, too, so I jumped in, swam to the raft, seized this rope, swam back and tied the rope to a tree. Then, of course, the raft drifted ashore. But I was just in time! Thank God, just in time! But run farther down the river, son, and see whether you can find the skiff."

There were two canoes or skiffs at the wharf, but one which was to be used for the voyage had been lifted aboard to prevent its being crushed against the shore.

"Here it is! here it is!" cried the boy before he had gone a hundred feet down the stream.

By this time, Mr. Lane, Martin and Mose were listening to Mr. Howard repeating the story. How did the raft get loose? The craftsman was sure that he had secured it well. How could the skiff wash away and

then drift ashore again? Martin mentioned the name of Coil Sanders. This individual lived at Green Briar, a settlement about ten miles from the Howards', and had a very unsavory reputation. He had passed by the shipping-station that afternoon and had asked several questions about the raft; still no one suspected him.

Both the skiff and the raft were brought back to the wharf. After much discussion, all agreed that the rapid rising of the current had been the cause of the disaster.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW LITTLE ROBIN STARTED THE WOODRUFF.

O WEN, Martin, wake up,—the river's falling!"

"What? what's the matter?" answered Owen as he and Martin sprang from their beds.

"Get up and be ready to start soon, for the river is falling fast," came the stentorian voice of Mr. Howard.

"What time is it?"

"Just a little after three; but the river is falling fast; you must be ready to start at daybreak. Are you up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Martin up too?"

"Yes, sir; we are both up."

"Well, breakfast is waiting for you." With these words Mr. Howard closed the door and started off toward the river to rejoin Mr. Lane.

Before retiring that night the two men had gone to the shipping-station to see whether all was safe, where on examining the scale they discovered that the current was receding fast; so fast indeed that it was doubtful whether the raft would be able to cross Cedar Ford. Until midnight Mr. Lane sat watching the ever diminishing height of the water; it was only then that the farmer could persuade him to take a short rest, promising

him to have the boys up and ready to start at daybreak.

Following Mr. Lane to the river Zachary Howard learned the good news that the water was still a few inches above the required height and that the river was falling more slowly; on returning to the house they found breakfast ready for the three voyagers.

"Come, now," said Mrs. Howard when the meal had been finished, "let us say our morning prayers together, and let us ask our good Lord to take care of you and bring you back safe."

Mr. Lane was not accustomed to joining the family during the morning and evening prayers which were always said in common; but on this occasion he bared his head and knelt with the rest.

"Have both of you your beads?" asked the mother when prayers had been finished.

"I have," said Martin.

"And I've mine," added Owen, shaking them in his pocket.

"Don't forget that you have promised to say them every night," was the warning voice of the mother.

"Let us hurry on to the river; it's dark now, but it will be broad daylight before you are off," said Mr. Howard.

"Where is little Robin?" asked Mr. Lane.

"I'm afraid it is too dark and damp to take him along," replied the mother.

"Wrap 'im up and I'll tote 'im," was the answer.

As Mr. Lane was so anxious to have Robin carry out

his part of the program, the little sleeper was awakened and dressed. Neither Aunt Margaret nor Uncle Pius could go to the river, but they came in from the kitchen to bid the boys good-bye. "May de good Lawd bless you, chile, an' may de angels hubber 'roun' you," said the former.

"Massar Owen an' Martin," added Uncle Pius, "I kinder bleve I won't see you two no mo'; 'member all de good times we had huntin' an' fishin', an' I do hope we'll hab dem in hebbin. Maybe when you gits back dis ole nigger'll be waitin' for de angels' trumpet, for I feel 'stonishin' weak, an' de rumatiz is crawlin' 'round me. Good-bye Massar Owen, good-bye Massar Martin."

"Dat's jest chuck full ob goodies," said Aunt Margaret, pointing to a basket which Mose was carrying on his shoulder.

As Mr. Howard was calling for the boys and hurrying them on they shook hands with the old negroes and rejoined the rest of the family on the porch. Mr. Lane, with little Robin nestling snugly in his arms, led the procession which filed off along the narrow path down the river bank. Mrs. Howard and Bertha wrapped their shawls around them as a protection against the damp, chilly air; the former could not restrain the tears which gathered in her eyes at the thought of the long separation from Owen. To her he was yet a little boy, a mere child who had never been absent from home for more than a few days,—he would now be gone for months. The voyage, too, although not extremely dangerous, had

been the cause of the death of many. Owen, too, now that the time of parting drew near, began to regard the voyage not so much a pleasure trip as one that entailed labor and privation; especially did he dread to say the last farewell, for he feared that he would not be able to check the emotions which he felt. Martin's grievance came from a different source. It had been arranged that the boat would leave the shipping-station about nine o'clock, and that his parents would be there to see him off; he would now be forced to start without hearing an encouraging word from them.

When the party left the house the first traces of approaching day were just visible in the eastern sky,—the whip-poor-will could be heard no more, but the meadow lark was pouring forth its matin carol and the speckled thrush began its call: twitter-twitter, twee twee. Before the river was reached the horizon was all aglow with crimson.

"You have no time to lose now," said Mr. Howard who was the first to speak.

"Not a minute," replied Mr. Lane examining the gauge, which registered two inches below the required height.

"Unfasten the rope," called out the farmer to Mose.

"Wouldn't it be better to get the stove on board first?" asked Bertha, pointing towards a large flat rock on which the fire was to be built for cooking.

"Of course, we should have thought of it yesterday; come, Mose, two of us can lift it. Get some small stones

and level it," continued the farmer when the primitive stove had been placed in its proper position.

"Is everything ready now?" inquired the father.

"It seems so," replied Bertha, the only one in the crowd who had not lost her voice.

In fact both Owen and Martin had stepped upon the raft where they pretended to be arranging something beneath a heap of flax; but in reality they were simply keeping away from Mrs. Howard and Bertha as long as possible, intending to step ashore and bid them a hasty good-bye when all was ready.

"Come now, my little man," said Mr. Lane, taking Robin in his arms and carrying him to the upper end of the dock. "Now, sir, you're to hol' this big boat till I tell you to let go; hol' 'er tight or she'll pull you in the river." Whereupon he wrapped the rope around a large beam and placed the end in the child's hands.

The little hero rose to the occasion, for planting his feet against the beam he tugged at the rope imagining that his unaided strength held the boat.

"Don't pull so hard, Robin, you will draw the raft up on the shore," remonstrated Bertha with a subdued twitter.

Robin seemed to think that there was danger of injuring the raft, for he relaxed his hold and sat down upon the wharf. Even this position soon became tiresome, so the little fellow lay down upon the hard platform; then he began to wonder why he had been taken from his soft bed and carried to the river. How hard those

boards were! soon, however, they began to soften, then they were transformed into his snug bed. Suddenly he found himself with Mr. Lane near the river; Mr. Lane was making a boat and he (Robin) was riding one of the big logs and playing horse; again the scene changed and he was sailing down the Beech Fork with his big friend — away and away they went. Robin was asleep.

Mr. Lane removed the single plank which reached from the shipping-station to the raft and began to wind two ropes which he had just unfastened, leaving the Woodruff anchored by the single rope which was in the hands of Robin. The two boys still pretended to be arranging various articles near the heap of flax; while Mose was working at the improvised stove, congratulating himself at the same time on escaping from the trip to the South and wondering whether Martin, who had taken his place, would have the unpleasant experience of being devoured by an alligator. Mr. Howard stepped into the warehouse to see whether anything had been forgotten; Bertha and her mother were conversing in whispers. Little Robin slept on. Even the two dogs, Bounce and Frisk, lay perfectly quiet with their heads resting between their front paws.

Suddenly there came a cry which startled all present.

"Le' me off dis heah boat!" screamed Mose, terrified to see that the raft had drifted from the shore.

"Throw in the line!" yelled Mr. Howard rushing from the shipping-station.

"Owen! Owen!" cried out Bertha.

The dogs barked; little Robin awoke and began to cry.

"Le' me off dis heah boat! Le' me off dis heah boat!" continued Mose piteously.

"Shut up and help us to get the poles," remonstrated Owen, trying in vain to remove them from under the heap of flax. In the meanwhile the raft drifted out into the current.

"I ain't goin' to be eat up by dem allergaders," yelled Mose, almost frantic with fear. Though he couldn't swim a stroke he leaped into the water, but fortunately came to the surface near the side of the raft, where he was rescued with some difficulty.

Hearing the screams and imagining no doubt that he was wanted aboard the Woodruff, Bounce sprang from the platform and swam toward the boat.

"Get back there! get back there! Bounce! Bounce! get back there!" cried Owen. But the dog came on. The heavy pole which the boy held slipped from his hands and cut a deep gash in the dog's head. Bounce gave a low growl and started for the shore; but the current struck him and drove him towards the boat.

"Come on, old fellow, come on," called the boy, who feared that the dog would not have strength to reach the shore. Bounce obeyed the call. As he was lifted into the boat he looked at Owen as if to say reproachfully: "Shame on you, Owen, for hitting an old friend who came out to help you!"

"That's a deep gash; I hope you haven't killed him," sighed Martin.

"I wouldn't kill that dog for all this boat," was the reply.

Mr. Lane the while had been trying to pole the raft ashore; but the water was too deep and the current too strong. "Why I forgot my 'rithmetic!" he suddenly exclaimed, running up and down the deck aimlessly. "We've got to go back."

"Yes; we is got fur to go back," repeated Mose. "I ain't goin' down to dem allgader states."

Just then the swift current struck one end of the raft, driving it with such force and with such a sudden jerk that both Mr. Lane and Mose were thrown upon the hard, rough deck. Faster and faster went the Woodruff until all hope of getting back to the shipping-station was abandoned. Mose continued to mutter something about alligators, while Mr. Lane bemoaned the loss of his arithmetic.

"Wait until we have passed Cedar Ford, then we can get down the skiff and take you ashore," were Owen's consoling words to the negro.

He and Martin, walking aft, took out their handkerchiefs and waved them to the little party on the platform. Martin's father and mother were there also, having arrived just as the boat began to disappear. Dimmer and dimmer became the figures on the bank until they were lost to view in the morning mist.

CHAPTER VII.

DOWN THE BEECH FORK.

AFTER all, that was the best way to start; it would have been hard to say good-bye." Owen, like most country lads, felt keenly this his first separation from home and family, and despite his best efforts his voice was husky and broken.

"I'm satisfied, for mother and father saw us off safely," replied Martin.

"That little rascal Robin! I wonder why he let the rope loose before he was told to do so?" asked Owen.

"Don't know; still he did his part of the work well, for he certainly started the Woodruff off without waiting for anyone to help him."

"Yes, he started us; but doesn't all seem strange! we have been talking of this trip for so many days and now we are on the way and going fast;" and he pointed to the receding trees along the shore. "But we have forgotten all about Bounce," continued Owen, walking to the place where the poor sufferer was lying. "We must patch that head up, Mart. I don't know much about such work; still, old Bounce won't be very par-

ticular. Shall we use camphor or dog-fennel?" he asked, opening a small box which his mother had provided.

"Bathe the head with camphor and then put on the fennel."

"Here's some cotton to bind up the wound; mother must have known that someone was going to get hurt."

"Don't use it all on the dog," protested Martin; "for one of us may yet need a piece of it."

"Wait, boys; don't touch the dog 'til we've crossed this here ford. In two minutes we'll be twirling like a leaf in a storm." Before Lane ceased speaking the boat began to vibrate with an unsteady tremor. Gradually it pitched to and fro while the water gurgled beneath; then on it went reeling, quivering, plunging,—no effort was made to guide it; it was left to be the sport of the rushing stream which at this point gathered its waters into a narrow compass and hurled them along with the force of a torrent.

"Golly, she's a-wigglin'!" exclaimed Mose, holding on to one of the corn-bins with both hands. "She's jes' a-goin' wibble-wobble!" he continued as the raft swayed from side to side.

"But she's holding together; a stout boat, I tell you!" was Mr. Lane's proud boast.

"We are going to hit that rock ahead!" exclaimed Martin.

Just at this place the river made a sharp turn, throwing the full force of the impinging current against a ledge which projected a few feet over the water.

"Step over here to the left; if we do hit the rock we'll knock a piece off and it may fall on your noggles," came the warning voice of Mr. Lane.

It was well for the boys that they obeyed orders, for one of the corn-bins crashed sheer against the ledge and was driven violently against the side of the boat where the boys had been standing. The current caught the stern of the raft and forced it with a slow rotatory movement into the calmer water below the ford. Shortly afterward Owen and Martin began to lower the skiff to take Mose ashore.

"Massar Owen," spoke up the negro, who was enjoying the ride and the morning breeze, "it's awful nice to be sailin' dis way. I jes' reckon I'll go ober de nex' fo'd; den I kin walk home 'fore night."

"You will have more than ten miles to walk," objected Owen.

"Don't make no dif'rence, I kin walk 'fore night."

"Then we'll tend to Bounce's head, and let you get off when we pass Rapier's ford." With these words Owen took out the camphor and began to apply it to the wound, while Mr. Lane and Mose examined the corn-bin to see whether it could be put back in the same place without removing the contents.

"Massar Lane," asked the negro, "is allergaders very dan'gous?"

"No."

"Could dey crawl into dis boat?"

"No."

"Is deah many ob dem down in de cotton states?"

"No."

"Is dey very 'tic'lar 'bout color'd fokes?"

"No."

"Massar Lane."

"Well, Mose?"

"Will dar be room in de raf' fur me?" The negro was enjoying his ride upon the Woodruff and was comparing it to the hard work in the fields; how much more pleasant it was to sit there idle than to mow hay or plow corn.

"Do you wish to go south with us?"

"Kinder bleve I do, Massar Lane, if dem fibs 'bout dem allergaders ain't true."

"You won't see an alligator, Mose; and even if you do they won't hurt you unless you tackle 'em first."

"Am dat so?"

"'Course; did you ever see a cow-snake, Mose?"

"'Deed I did many's a time."

"Did one ever bite you?"

"No, sir; I kept clean out de way."

"Well that's all you's got to do with alligators; keep out of the way and they won't hurt you."

This settled the matter for Mose; he would go south on the Woodruff, and if he should be so unlucky as to meet an alligator he would part company with it at once.

"Martin," said Mr. Lane, "Mose wants to come south with us; what do you and Owen say 'bout it?"

"If he isn't afraid of alligators."

"Yes," chimed in Owen, "there is room for all four of us and plenty to eat, too."

"But will there be room in the boat on our way back?" objected Martin.

"That skiff'll hold four men," replied Mr. Lane emphatically as he walked to the place where Owen was binding up Bounce's head.

"Wow, wow," yelped the dog when the camphor was applied.

"Listen to that; even Bounce wants you to come. Don't you, old fellow?" He again applied the pungent ointment.

"Wow, wow, wow, wow."

"I reckon I'll go den, 'cause all in you wants me."

"That saves us the trouble of getting down the skiff, so we can help Mr. Lane to get the corn-bin in place before we come to Rapier's Ford," said Martin.

Owen continued to bandage the dog's head, caressing him all the while as if he were a sick child. It was no slight injury Bounce had received; during the entire morning he lay upon the deck breathing heavily and lapping the water which Owen occasionally brought in the palm of his hand.

"Halloo! look at this rope—it was cut." Martin had picked up the end of the rope with which the raft had been secured on the previous night when it drifted away.

"Who could have done that?" asked Owen walking over to his companion.

"He had a sharp knife whoever he was," added the first speaker.

"Mr. Lane, did you see this?" called out Owen. "The raft didn't wash away last night; someone cut the rope."

Richard Lane took the hempen cable and turned it in his hand for some seconds without a word. "Coil Sanders done it, boys," he said finally. "As sure's my name's Dick Lane, Coil Sanders done it. That's what he's 'round for yesterday. If I'm 'lected Sheriff of Nelson County next November I'll arrest him, sure's my name's Dick Lane."

Mr. Lane's affirmation convinced the boys that Sanders was guilty. All soon set to work to replace the cornbin, and in the interest and excitement the supposed attempt to steal the raft was forgotten.

The Woodruff kept steadily on; now slacking its speed as it veered to the right or left, now driven merrily along by the full force of the stream. What a pleasant ride it was that bright spring morning! All the world seemed to move! the boat moved, the river moved, the banks moved, the wooded hills moved. How delightful it was to watch the varied windings of the stream ahead, or to gaze at the receding hills and blue, distant knobs. On, on they sailed; a noisy kingfisher chattered near its nest in the red-clay bank, and a friendly crane looked out at them from the tall grass where it was enjoying a breakfast on luckless frogs and minnows.

Far down the river beneath the extending branches of

stately sycamores the white waves danced in the morning sun, for the Woodruff was approaching Rapier's Ford. With ever-increasing speed it went,—yet so noiselessly, so smoothly that one would scarcely note how with each moment it gained in the rapidity of its movement. Then it sprang forward and was soon darting over the ford,—twirling, tossing, jostling, as if it were but a withered leaf; but not once did it swerve from the channel. On both sides the foaming water laughed and played. How strange was it to see the murky river here as white as banks of snow!

“Have we any swifter places than this?” asked Martin of Mr. Lane as the boat left the ford and drove out into the quiet basin below.

“One in the Rolling Fork before we come to the Salt River.”

“And are there no falls in the Salt River?”

“I reckon not; but the Rollin' Fork ford is dangerous.”

As the progress of the boat was not slow, everyone busied himself with arranging something on deck. Mr. Lane, assisted by Mose, worked on the corn-bin, which stubbornly refused to return to its former position. Owen drove nails into the side of the boat to hold his pans and opened a hole in the flax to store away his bin, cups and plates, while Martin seized an axe and cut wood for the stove.

It was about eleven o'clock when the Woodruff reached the Rolling Fork. This stream is about the same width

as the Beech Fork, but is swifter and contains a larger volume of water and gives its name to the river formed by the junction of the two streams.

Mr. Lane looked anxiously ahead as he approached the confluence of the two rivers, for if the Rolling Fork had not risen the waters of the Beech Fork would be greatly diminished in the wide basin. His worst fears were realized; as the raft drew near the main tributary the clear current indicated plainly that it had not rained in that section of the country drained by the Rolling Fork.

"Boys," said he, "if this boat is a strong one we'll know it before the sun sets. But I reckon we won't give up; get your poles ready for work."

The preparations were ready none too soon, for the Woodruff swept around a curve and was within a hundred yards of the ford.

"If we can slip through that hole we're safe; but if we hit a rock in the current there may be enough of the raft left to take us to the shore, but it'll never take us to the Mississippi." Mr. Lane pointed to the narrow channel through which the water rushed with maddening force.

"Lawd 'ave mercy on dis nigger!" exclaimed Mose, who began to realize that after all there was not so much fun in passing rapids.

Mr. Lane did not speak; he laid aside his pole, took a position in the middle of the raft, folded his arms and waited. He did not think that the lives of the party

were in danger, but he did fear that the raft would be too badly damaged to continue the voyage. The boat dashed on — closer and closer it came to the roaring vortex. Mose groaned and wished that he were at work in the corn-field. Owen prayed, Martin with bared head imitated his example, Mr. Lane stood perfectly rigid. The boat leaped into the channel; to right and left the rocks seemed to wait for it. Owen closed his eyes and rested his head against a heap of flax. At what seemed the same instant, the captain gave a loud shout of triumph; the Woodruff had swept through the narrow passage without striking a single rock.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. LANE CATCHES A STRANGE FISH.

HOW far did we miss the rocks?" asked Owen as he raised his head and looked back at the perilous rapids.

"Not an inch," replied Martin.

"No, not an inch," said Mr. Lane. "We couldn't pass the falls once in ten thousand times with the river that low. I believe it was one of the things which happened when the fellers went around Jer'cho blowing on horns and the walls fell down."

"A miracle," suggested Owen.

"That's what it was, a— a— what you call it?"

"A miracle."

"Yes, yes; a miracle. Don't know much about such things; but that's what it was and a genuine one at that."

"It did seem strange," said Martin, "for just as the boat came to the narrow part of the channel it swung around lengthwise."

"Well, we are over and safe; and the next thing to do is to prepare dinner. Come on, Mose, let us see how our fireplace works. Why, what's the matter?"

Don't look so scared; there's no danger now. Is there Bounce?" Patting the dog gently on the head, Owen went to the end of the boat to prepare his meal.

The negro followed slowly without uttering a word, then stooping close to Owen, who was lighting a fire, asked in a whisper:

"Is dar no mo' fo'ds?"

"No; why?"

"I don't like dem fo'ds, Massar Owen; no I don't."

"We've passed the last one."

"Massar Owen?"

"Well, Mose?"

"Is the Ohio River swif' an' strong?"

"I think it is."

Short silence.

"Massar Owen?"

"All right."

"Is de Miss'ippi dang'ous?"

"Don't know — never saw it."

A longer silence.

"Massar Owen, how far am it frum home?"

"You don't wish to go back, do you?"

"No; but I'se jes' kinder scar'd."

The conversation was interrupted by Martin, who came to assist the two cooks. "Do you want this cold chicken cut up?" he asked.

"Yes, for to-morrow is Friday, you know."

"That's a fact; we must set a trot line for catfish."

"We'll be satisfied with a twelve pounder to-night;

but when we come to the Mississippi nothing less than a hundred pounder will do. But fish or no fish," continued Owen, "we'll at least have enough of rye-coffee." He ran his hands into the sack which Aunt Margaret had filled.

But few of the Western settlers enjoyed in those days the delicacy of a cup of coffee; parched rye sweetened with maple sugar was the usual morning drink. Even to-day many a visitor to the Trappist monastery in Central Kentucky is surprised when told that the coffee he drank for breakfast was made of parched rye.

Before dinner was ready the two boys noticed that Mr. Lane had thrown himself upon the hard boards and was fast asleep. It was with some difficulty that he was roused. After finishing a hasty meal he returned to his position, placed a bundle of flax under his head, warned the boys to awake him if they needed assistance, and was soon snoring loudly.

While Martin and Owen were talking in a low voice around the rustic dinner table they were startled by a loud explosion which sent the coffee kettle overboard into the water. Mr. Lane, however, was not disturbed.

"There goes my can!" cried Owen; "the only one we have for making coffee." The boy tore off his coat and was about to leap into the river when Martin seized him.

"Stop," he said. "It isn't going to sink; we can get it with the skiff." Martin was right, for the can had just sufficient water in it to keep it balanced and

make it float. The small boat was lowered and the utensil recovered. The accident taught the boys to use only dry stones in constructing fireplaces, for the explosion had been caused by the too rapid heating of the limestone flag soaked with water.

"We'll leave the skiff in the river for a while," said Martin as he stepped from the canoe into the raft.

"Then fasten it at the end of the raft; it will be safer there if we run near the shore," was the reply.

"There isn't much danger of our running ashore at present; in fact, I don't believe we are moving. What do you think?"

"I reckon we are not going very rapidly; we must be near the Salt River; you remember that Mr. Lane said that the current was slow where the two rivers joined."

"Mose intends to imitate Mr. Lane," whispered Martin, pointing toward the negro, who had crept beneath the shadow of the heap of flax.

The boat drifted by under a tall sycamore where it was quiet and cool. "Suppose all of us take a sleep," suggested Owen.

"No! when they have rested we can have our nap. But I'm sleepy, though; it seemed when father called us this morning I hadn't been in bed ten minutes."

The boys were more fatigued than they were willing to admit, exchanging but few words as they watched the panorama of green hills which passed slowly before their view. They were close enough to catch the fra-

grance from the blossoms of myriads of May-apples which grew in the deep shade of the woods, and to see the red glare of the ironwood and the white blossom of the dogbush, both of which served to break the monotony of the continuous green hills.

On floated the Woodruff slowly,—more slowly. Mr. Lane snored loudly; Mose to all appearances was fast asleep. Owen's head sank upon his breast, then he gave a slight lunge forward, looked at Martin, laughed, braced himself and immediately nodded again. This was repeated several times until at last Owen, too, was in the land of dreams. Martin watched his vain efforts to keep awake, proud of the fact that the Woodruff was left entirely to his own management; and, as the young captain was determined not to be caught as his companion had been, he resolved to stand and thus avoid all danger of falling asleep. As he stood there with his arms folded upon his breast it occurred to him that it would be a good idea to get a fishing line and try his luck. What a pleasant surprise it would be for the others on awakening to find a blue catfish for the morrow's meal. The catfish did not seem to be anxious to enter into the boy's plans for surprising the other members of the crew, at least none came to offer its services or to taste the cold chicken which was used for bait. Martin soon grew tired of fishing and watching all alone. Would Owen never awake? Did Mr. Lane intend to sleep on forever? And Mose,—he at least should be up and working, for he had not been on duty for two suc-

cessive nights as Mr. Lane had been. After all, since he had to watch for so long a time, why not sit down? Martin did sit down,—in less than five minutes he was fast asleep.

But Martin's eyes had scarcely closed when one eye of Mose was slowly opened; then both eyes opened; then Mose raised his head and looked around; then he stood up, walked cautiously towards the small boat, crept softly into it and rowed up the stream.

Mr. Lane was the first of the crew to awake. He glanced around and to his surprise found the Woodruff circling in an eddy formed by the back waters of the Salt River, which owing to the heavy rains had risen several feet. There was Owen sleeping soundly with his head resting against the side of the raft, while Martin was unconsciously grasping his fishing line. But where was Mose? Something else seemed to be missing,—what was it? It was some seconds before he noticed that the canoe was gone. Mose had escaped in it,—this Mr. Lane concluded at once. That skiff was necessary for the voyage, necessary to tow the raft ashore at night,—necessary for the return trip! He was determined to recover it,—to follow Mose even to the Howard wharf.

The Woodruff continued its unvarying movement in the eddy. When close to the shore Mr. Lane watched his opportunity and after several unsuccessful attempts succeeded in throwing a rope on a branch of a leaning sycamore and securing the raft. Then rifle in hand he leaped to the bank and started up the river in pursuit

of the fugitive negro. With great strides he worked his way through the tangled underbrush and along the soft banks. The perspiration fell in beads from his brow; unconsciously he quickened his pace. A dark object loomed up through the foliage! Was it the canoe? Yes — no! only a log floating down the stream. Another object — yes, that was it. The canoe veered from side to side; it was evident that Mose was not accustomed to handling an oar. His pursuer made a detour through the wood and gained the bank fifty feet above the fugitive.

“Stop or I’ll blow your black head off,” came the summons.

“I gib in, Massar Lane, I gib in.”

“You’d better give in.”

“Massar Lane don’t pint dat rifle dis way, it might go off.”

“It will go off and right into your noggle.”

“I done told you I gib in.”

“Stealing our skiff!” remonstrated Mr. Lane, dropping the rifle to his side.

“Stealin’ nuffin. I’s goin’ fur to set it loose at de fo’d; I know’d you’d git it.” The negro came slowly toward the bank. “You ain’t goin’ fur to do nuffin’ to me, is you, Massar Lane?”

“No, ’less you try to run away again.”

“I won’t do dat, no I won’t — ’cause you’s got me an’ I gibb’d in. An’ you won’t tell de boys.”

“No! I reckon not.” Mr. Lane took the oars and

rowed back to the raft with his discomfited captive.

"Grab my line! he's running away with it!" At the same time Martin sprang to his feet — too late, however, for the line which he saw disappearing beneath the surface of the water.

Owen, too, awoke; the two boys stood looking at each other in astonishment. Where was Mr. Lane? Where was Mose? Where the skiff? Owen was the first to offer a solution of the mystery. "I know what has happened," he said, "while we were asleep Mr. Lane and Mose brought the boat to this place and then went a-fishing."

Martin did not dissent from this statement, but turned his head and gazed up the river to see whether the two men were in sight. He was soon busy with another fishing line, for he was determined to catch enough for Friday's breakfast.

"Why not put out a throw line?" asked Owen. "There are three of them in the box." The throw line was made of strong cord, some fifty feet in length, to which were tied a dozen smaller strings, called snoods, with hooks.

"I should like to get the cat which ran away with my hook," replied Martin as he unwound the line and baited it with cold chicken and chicken bones.

"Give Bounce something to eat," called out Owen, who for the first time since noon thought of the poor dog. But Bounce refused to eat; he only lapped a few drops of water from his master's hand as the boy caressed

him and begged his pardon for hitting him with the pole.

"There come the two fishermen," yelled Owen.

"Catch anything?" cried out Martin as the canoe drew closer.

"Yes, a big one," replied Mr. Lane.

"Is it a catfish?"

"Ya, ya! he cotched me!" laughed Mose.

"I thought you didn't want 'em to know," said Mr. Lane.

"I'm kinder glad now, an' I'm goin' fur to stick right by dis ark."

"Yes," continued the captain, dropping the oars and turning toward the two boys, "he stole the skiff and started for home, and I foller'd him for two miles——"

"An' I seed 'im an' jes' gibbed in," acknowledged the negro.

"I'm going to throw him overboard to the first alligator we see," declared Owen.

"No! we'll let him off this time," contended Martin, "but if he tries it again, over he'll go."

"'Deed I won't do nuffin' but stick by de ark."

Martin wished to set a throw line for the fish which had run away with his hook, but Mr. Lane insisted on starting at once, and as the current of the Salt River was slow the sun had set before the raft was towed ashore at the junction of the stream with the Ohio. Here Martin baited and cast his line, while Owen and Mose prepared supper.

Mr. Lane ordered the boys to bed early that night, telling them that he would start at day-break. Before retiring they recited their beads,—recited them aloud with Mose, while Mr. Lane with bared head listened to them in silence. He himself had never been taught to pray, yet he could not but notice the influence that prayer had worked upon these two boys. What generous, noble lads they were; how different from the many selfish persons whom he had met in life!

The boys wrapped themselves in their coarse, home-woven blankets and lay down upon the hard logs with a bundle of flax for a pillow; Mose sat smoking his cob-pipe for some time, then stretched himself upon the deck.

Mr. Lane kept guard for the greater part of the night, fearing that Sanders might make a second attempt to steal the raft; finally he, too, lay down to snatch a few hours' rest, and to prevent Mose from escaping he occupied the canoe which was moored at the side of the Woodruff.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TWO CONSPIRATORS.

At dusk, when the Woodruff reached the Ohio, the Louisville and Nashville stage drew up at a settlement near the Green River sixty miles from the Howard Manor. Poplar Flat boasted just four log cabins,—having neither store nor tavern,—a low, damp, unwholesome place, chosen as a relay station for the stage line on account of its position, lying as it did half way between Bardstown and Cedar Creek.

The passengers were alighting cramped from the coach when a horseman rode up, who, judging from his panting and jaded beast, had covered many a mile without a stop. He wore a faded brown coat and pantaloons of blue strouding. His head was small and oval; his beard black and closely trimmed; his eyes dull; his shoulders broad and square, though slightly stooped. No one heeded him or noticed the sign which he made to Cyrus Appleway to follow him into the woods.

“Well!” said Cyrus as the two walked together.

“Tried it alone,” answered Coil.

“How?”

Coil glanced toward the stage; no one was observing them.

"Had a narrow escape," he began. "When you left me at Green Briar I walked over to Howards', got there while they were loadin' the boat, just chuckin' it full of things. Concluded to try it alone—so cut her loose at night."

"Without me," interrupted Appleway.

Sanders hung his head. "I was goin' to hide the raft and wait for you," he muttered.

"Where?"

"On the Ohio 'bove Botland."

"I see." Appleway looked his accomplice in the face; it was evident that he did not trust Sanders.

"They got the raft loaded at dark," resumed the latter. "The river was raisin' so fast I thought I'd be able to git to the Ohio 'fore mornin'. Here I'd hide it 'long the shore, go to Botland in the skiff and git you. We could float down the river durin' the night and be in the bushes durin' the day. In the meantime the Howards would think the raft went to pieces ag'in the rocks. Good scheme, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but how did it work?"

"Didn't work worth shucks! I cut the rope and jumped in a skiff near by, but 'fore the raft was a foot from the shore down came old Howard,—and the way he yelled!"

"Did he see you?"

"Don't think so, for it was tol'able dark. I got down in the skiff and worked ashore. Such a noise I never heard in my born days! There seemed to be 'bout fifty

people yellin' and long on a hundred dogs barkin'. I got off in the bushes and hid, while they caught the raft and found the skiff. I think I heard someone mention my name, for they seen me 'round 'fore dark."

"Will they suspect you?"

"Don't know, and don't care."

"But I care," objected Appleway. "If Lane thinks that someone is trying to rob him he'll be on the lookout for us."

"I reckon not; he'll forget all 'bout it 'fore he reaches the Miss'ippi."

"Sorry you tried it all alone, but it's too late to talk about it now; so we'll carry out my first plan, wait for the raft at Botland, follow, and attack below the Ohio."

"Jus' what I rid over here fur."

"Then I'll go and tell the driver that I'm not feeling well, and that I'll wait over for the next stage."

"I reckon so."

"We need a canoe to go to Botland; how much will it cost?" asked Cyrus.

"Not much, fur old man Hickson goes down to Botland tol'able often fur groc'ries an' can bring the skiff back with him."

"I'll pay for it; but now remember, two-thirds of the money from the raft goes to me."

"That's what we agreed on," assented Coil. The two walked slowly toward the relay-station maturing their plans.

Night came on. The stage was ten miles from Poplar

Flat, creeping in the darkness over the rough road and beneath the outstretched branches of trees. Down the Green River glided a canoe with the two conspirators, each mistrustful of the other and each planning to possess himself of the entire cargo of the raft. Moored at the mouth of the Salt River, the Woodruff was rocking gently; Martin, Owen and Mose asleep, but Mr. Lane kept watch.

Owen's father, mother and sister sat talking until late at night and wondering how far the raft had gone and why Mose did not return; then followed night prayers which, according to a pious custom among the old settlers, were always said in common. "Now let us say five *Our Fathers* and *Hail Marys* for the success of the voyage," added Mr. Howard when the usual prayers had been recited. Zachary Howard was a man of strong, practical, simple faith. Having at stake the fruit of his own toil and that of his neighbors, and knowing that his son and nephew were in the company of one who had practiced no religion, and that this indifference of Mr. Lane was apt to have an evil influence on the minds of the two boys, he sought the protection and blessing of Heaven. He was hopeful; but his hope, like that of every true, Christian father, was in God. Truly, the boys needed a father's and mother's prayers to shield them from the many perils which awaited them on their eventful trip.

CHAPTER X.

THE BEAUTIFUL RIVER.

OWEN! Owen!" whispered Martin, who was the first to awake. "Come let us pole the raft out into the Ohio before Mr. Lane and Mose get up."

"How surprised they'll be!" answered Owen, acting at once upon his companion's suggestion.

There was no fatiguing labor in drawing up the anchor and raising the sails,—to untie the heavy, hempen rope which secured the raft to a tree near the shore, to pole the raft out into the current of the Salt River,—this was all. With a tremulous rotating motion it glided into the swifter current of the Ohio; then down, down it floated swiftly, noiselessly.

The two boys mounted to the top of a corn-bin; there they stood, Owen with his arms crossed upon his breast, and Martin supporting himself against one of the poling stakes which he held in his right hand, both gazing out on the ever-changing scene of sky and land and water.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Owen enchanted by the glory and grandeur of the scene.

"The Indians were right when they called it the Beautiful River," chimed in Martin.

Beautiful it was! Beautiful in that mild May morning! Clear as the brook which winds through summer meadows; for the forests that clothed its banks and the banks of its tributary streams were yet untouched by the axe,—and the ten thousand times ten thousand streams which fed this river with their crystal waters oozed over mossy stones and glided through green ravines. When the rain fell in torrents the tiny streams ran with a merry laugh, but they were not muddy; nor were the larger brooks and creeks which received them nor the great river into which they poured their united volume. The Beautiful River! off to the east its waters were a sheet of flame. On its surface the morning sun flashed and gleamed; it lit up the purple shells in the clear, deep water, and glinted from the mica sands until the shore seemed strewn with diamonds. On either side, the polished leaves of the sour-gum were turned to gold; in the deep recesses of the woods the wild-grape vines were clothed in garments of olive hue; stately oaks and giant sycamores kept guard along its shores, while from the boughs of the underbrush the thrush mingled its sweet and varied song with the stream's deep and never-changing notes. The Beautiful River! beautiful it was that bright May morning when the Woodruff drifted down its current.

"That's a tol'ably big river," came the unpoetic voice of Mr. Lane, breaking in on their reverie.

"Yes, sir; we were just enjoying the scene," replied Owen.

"We thought that we would surprise you by starting before you awoke," put in Martin.

"Glad you done it, boys; but now we must have something to eat."

"Let me see if I caught anything on the throw-line." Martin leaned over the side of the raft and lifted the cord which he had cast into the river on the previous evening. "It's a big one," he continued, "if that jerk means anything."

"What a land!" cried Owen in so loud a voice that Mose was aroused.

"An old gar-fish!" ejaculated Martin. "Uncle Pius would make a breakfast on him, but we'll throw him back. Halloo! something else on that line,—a—a—a fine bluecoat,—not a ten-pounder, but at least three pounds,—and look there, will you! a silver perch on the last hook,—just the kind you like for breakfast, Mr. Lane."

"Don't frow dat gar-fish back, Massar Martin," said Mose. "It's de bestest kind."

"Then you will have to scale it."

"I kin do dat in free shakes of a sheep's tail."

"Well, what do you think of the Ohio?" asked Owen.

"Right smart river! but is we gittin' near de all-gader country, Massar Owen?"

"No!" was the quick reply, "it will be a month before you see one."

"I ain't scared, Massar Owen; no I ain't. I'se goin' to stick to de ark and go right wid you."

"No meat this morning?" asked Mr. Lane as Owen began to prepare the fish.

"No, sir; you said you wouldn't eat meat on Fridays as long as you lived with Catholics."

"Does the rule hold away from home?"

"Yes, sir."

"And out in the woods?"

"Yes, sir; everywhere, and all the year around."

"Well, I didn't think the rule was made for woods and boats."

He was so pleased with the perch which Owen had prepared for him that he remarked as he took the last of the fish: "You kin keep your meat if you jus' give me a breakfast like this on Fridays. And now, boys," he continued, "we must take names; that's the way it's always done. I'll be called the captain."

"I'll be the cook," said Owen, who did not wish to entrust this important office to Mose.

"Put me down as doctor," demanded Martin; "we have one sick fellow to attend to already; haven't we, Bounce?" and the boy began to caress the dog.

Mose received the name of Noah, much to his delight. "Dat fits me," said he, "for I'se goin' to stick to de ark."

"It's easy work going down the river," replied the captain, "but I reckon it won't be so easy to row back; still many others has done it."

"We are going to do our best," answered Owen.

"We can certainly reach home before cold weather sets in."

"Many a traveler has thrown together a log cabin and camped out all winter; if it comes to the worst, we can do the same," affirmed Martin, seemingly pleased with the prospects of such an adventure.

For an hour the boys discussed the possibilities which the future might bring, while the captain sat close by sending up wreaths of smoke from his cob pipe. He began to think of those election speeches which he was to deliver the following October. Visions of future glory rose up before him as he pictured the immense throng gathered at the Cross Roads to listen to his convincing arguments; he almost heard his name re-echoed by the excited crowd on election day; in spirit he entered upon his official career as Sheriff of Nelson County.

"What, sir?" answered Owen, who was sitting the nearest to him.

"I didn't say anything, did I?"

"Yes, sir; and you've been talking for half an hour—something about the election."

"I reckon I've been thinking on it a tol'able lot."

"And talking about it, too; why Mr. Lane, it is five months before the election."

"But I must get that speech ready, else I'll be standing before the crowd jus' like a scare-crow."

"Did you ever hear Henry Clay speak, Mr. Lane?"

"Long on three years ago."

"Father says he's the best speaker in the country."

"He's a tol'ably good speaker, but I jus' tell you, Owen, he ain't no shucks against the Squire; there ain't no feller in the country to outshoot Squire Grundy in speaking."

"That's all the better for you, sir; you know that the Squire is on your side."

"That he is, my boy; he's goin' to give me a 'tro-ducshun, or something of the sort,—just like loading a feller's rifle for him when he's going to shoot."

"I hear that Mudd can't sign his name," said Owen, wishing to encourage his giant friend by recalling the defects of the opposing candidate.

"I reckon he kin by this time, for he's working hard; but I'm ahead of him in 'rithmetic."

The captain bemoaned the fact that he had forgotten his book, for he had hoped to be able to cipher well before his return to Kentucky; still the boys would be able to assist him even without the arithmetic.

"It's time to spread that blanket between the corn-bins," suggested the doctor, who had been sitting in the sun for an hour.

"It is getting warm," assented the cook as he began to unfold a heavy hemp awning; "Aunt Margaret finished it two days ago; she says it's good for all kind of weather,—during the warm day it will keep us cool, and during the cool, damp nights it will keep us warm."

"Halloo! what's that?" exclaimed the doctor, picking up a small object which fell from the folds of the awning.

"Hurrah!" cried out the cook, "Mr. Lane's book."

"My book?"

"Yes, sir."

"My 'rithmetic?"

"Yes, sir; here it is."

"You're right, sure's my name's Dick Lane. Now I reckon I'll git the sums in long division; Squire Grundy says I must git long division good before I begin to collect the tax."

Long division was a puzzle to the candidate; many a laugh did the two teachers have at his expense. The trial divisor,—how the captain scratched his head and became confused as he scratched for the trial divisor! Then the long line of figures to be marshalled out and brought down one after the other,—sometimes two were brought down and sometimes three,—what could it all mean? and yet it had to be learned if he wished to be Sheriff of Nelson County.

No hand was needed to guide the raft. Seated beneath the awning, the boys looked out over the stretch of water and the green hills beyond; at times interrupting their conversation to assist the captain with his arithmetic.

"Look!" cried Martin, pointing to a column of smoke which rose in the midst of a clearing on the left bank of the river. "There's a settler's house."

"What a lonely place!" replied the cook. "Halloo! the children are running out to see us."

"We'll give them a salute, boys," and the captain fired his heavy pistol three times.

A man in the door of the cabin waved his hat, while the urchins along the shore danced and shouted. How they welcomed any boat or raft which floated by and for a moment broke the monotony of their uneventful lives. The little cabin and the happy children soon disappeared, — hill after hill loomed up in the west, passed before the gaze of the small crew, then faded away to the east in the blue horizon.

Throughout the day Bounce was a source of care and anxiety, for despite the dainty meal prepared by the cook and the constant urging of the doctor, he refused to eat; still he drank whenever Owen gave him water in the palms of his hands.

"You are giving that patient too much water," protested the doctor. "Sick people should not drink water unless it has first been boiled with slippery-elm in it." Martin was speaking from experience, for he remembered that when as a child he had a fever, elm bark was always put into the water before it was given to him.

"How much bark do you want?" asked Owen, walking to the pile of firewood.

"Only a small piece. Do you find any there?"

"Yes; enough for ten sick people."

"That's lucky," replied the doctor, who took out his pocket-knife and began to peel the bark from the stick which the cook had brought. "This will keep down the fever," he continued as he stirred the bark in a cup of water.

So the day passed by. The two boys caressed and

pitied Bounce; Mr. Lane studied arithmetic and talked about his speech, while Mose, disregarding all protests, looked to right and left for alligators.

It was past ten o'clock when the captain lowered the small boat and with a powerful stroke gradually towed the raft toward the shore, where it was securely moored for the night.

CHAPTER XI.

A LAZY MAN'S SPORT.

THE hoot-owl ceased its melancholy call, trimmed its soft, cinereous plumage and with rapid, noiseless flight sought its retreat in the hollow trunk of a red-oak; the rain-crow began to croak as it flew to the river bank for its morning bath; the eastern sky grew bright and crimson until it seemed a swamp of flame. Mr. Lane awoke and gazed out upon the shore. There before him were myriad clusters of wild snap-dragons with blooms of hyacinth blue, and May-apples with their snowy blossoms, and patches of pawpaw bushes laden with young and tender fruit. The captain did not pause to enjoy the glorious awakening of day or the beauty of the scene before him; unfastening the rope he poled the raft out into the current.

The two boys slept on until the sun was high in the heavens. They were delighted to hear that Bounce remained quiet during the night. On removing the bandage it was found that the wound was no longer livid and that the flesh was knitting together; before a week had passed only a scar remained to mark the place where Owen had struck him.

As the river was falling the raft was constantly forced to the very center of the current; but the current veered at times toward the banks, and at one time threatened to wreck the Woodruff. The captain, who was ever on the look-out, was the first to notice that there was danger ahead.

"See them rocks," said he to the boys, pointing at the same time toward a bare, smoke-gray cliff that rose sheer from the water's edge. "I reckon we're going to git a shaking up, but I calculate the Woodruff will pull through."

"The current seems to strike the rocks," added Martin.

"And to hit them hard," put in Owen.

"Anything to be knocked overboard?" asked the captain. "Look 'round, boys, and see if everything's safe."

Buckets, pans, rifles, pistols — all were secured, then the boys stood at the edge of the raft to await the shock.

"She's dancing now," said the cook, as the Woodruff was shaken in the choppy and irregular waves.

"She's going faster, too," asserted Martin, "but not as fast as when we went over Rapier's Ford."

"We missed the rocks then," rejoined the cook, "but we haven't any chance to escape these monsters before us. See how rough they are, too; still there isn't much danger of making a hole through a log a foot thick."

"I reckon there ain't," said the captain, evidently pleased with the remark. "This boat has stood the fords and I calculate she'll pass the rocks." Faster went the boat; nearer and nearer it drew to the impending

cliff. Not even Mr. Lane was prepared for the shock that followed the collision.

"Great pos-sim-mons!" he exclaimed as he raised himself from the deck and glanced around hurriedly to see whether the Woodruff was leaking or in any way damaged. The cook and the doctor were soon disentangling themselves from a heap, while pots and pans were rattling along the floor; the unwieldy heap of flax was heaved to one side, and a pistol which hung from an improvised peg was discharged.

"That's what I call a strong boat!" called out the captain in the midst of the confusion. "If people only made rafts like this Woodruff, there wouldn't be no busting 'gainst rocks and sand banks and drowning people, and spilling corn and whisky all 'long the river. No there wouldn't."

Clumsy as the Woodruff seemed it had much to recommend it, for, if constructed of ship timber it would in all probability have been seriously damaged by the rocks. There was but one vulnerable spot,—to injure the raft it was necessary to break the oaken pins which secured the ends of the logs.

"That's a deep gash," remarked the doctor, who had walked over to examine the indentation made in the log.

"Fully four inches deep," answered the cook, bending over and putting his double fists into the ragged hole. "It is well for us that Mr. Lane used logs, and thick logs, too, in building the boat."

By this time the Woodruff had floated out of the

turbulent water near the rocks into the calm, deep current. The captain returned to his arithmetic and political speech, and the boys lay beneath the awning chatting away like parrots and making preparations for fishing.

Even to-day, when standing upon the elevated banks of the Ohio, Missouri, or Mississippi, one often sees far out in the stream a small boat and around it a dozen or more dark objects,—either empty jugs or painted blocks of poplar, bobbing and diving like so many ducks. To each of these blocks is attached a cord about six feet in length with a hook at the lower end. This method of fishing is called “jugging,” for empty jugs are more often used than pieces of wood. These floats are thrown overboard by the fishermen, who watches them from his boat until one disappears; then he starts in pursuit. If the captive fish is a large one the chase often lasts for an hour and is equivalent to a game of “hide and go seek;” but the fish is eventually tired out by the strain of the float, which ever draws it toward the surface.

When the preparations had been completed the boys cast a dozen floats into the current.

“You can follow the first one,” said Martin.

“No, we’ll go together; one can row and the other be ready to grab the line.”

“Perhaps that’s better.”

“But it is a lazy man’s way of fishing, isn’t it?”

“Only lazy men fish; so I’ve always heard.”

“If you git a thirty pounder on that line,” put in the captain, “you’ll say there ain’t nothing lazy ’bout it.”

"See how they are drifting apart even now," remarked the cook; "if this continues for half an hour the floats will be scattered up and down the river for a mile or more."

"Why not tie them all into one long line and let them train behind the raft?" asked the doctor.

"That would be only a floating throw line." was Owen's reply. "We can fish that way in the Beech Fork; but we want something new in the Ohio River."

"There goes one under!" exclaimed Martin.

"Where?"

"To the right, see the ripple."

"Jump into the skiff." In went Martin, and Owen after him.

"This is close to the place," said the cook after a short row.

"I reckon it is hard to judge."

"We'll wait for a moment."

"There! I see it below the raft;" and with this statement the doctor seized the oars and began to pull.

"Stop!" said the cook after Martin had gone a few feet.

"Why?"

"Because the float is under again."

"To your left," called out Mr. Lane.

Again the oars were at work.

"Slowly, slowly," whispered Owen, "only a few feet more. Lift your oar so as not to touch the log;—that's right,—now,—confound it! he is gone!"

As a general thing a captive fish drifted with the current; but this special fish which the two boys were pursuing had departed from all known rules and customs, — in the current and out of it, — to the right and to the left, — up and down the river; — it appeared just where the boys least expected it, yet never remained in one place long enough to be lifted into the boat. Martin was soon entirely fagged, then Owen took the oars, but made such efforts to reach the prize that in a few minutes his strength was exhausted. Then they changed their tactics and rowed slowly, while from the raft Mr. Lane directed and encouraged them.

“I’m afraid the line has caught under a snag,” said Martin, pointing toward the place where the poplar log had disappeared.

“It would be too bad if we lost that fish after so much work,” replied Owen.

“Yes, it would,” assented the doctor.

The boys, who were about fifteen yards above the raft, were suddenly startled by a shout of triumph from the captain, as the big man lifted what appeared to be a young whale from the water. For the float having come to the surface quite close to him, Mr. Lane had only to reach out and seize the line. But when the captive fish was fully out of the water it gave a single jerk, snapped the hook, and regained its liberty.

“Great pos-sim-mons!” and the giant hurled the block against the deck. “What a fool I was! trying to lift a hundred-pound cat from the water on that small hook!”

"Gosh!" cried Mose, "dar's a young allergader."

A moment's reflection would have convinced the captain that he was attempting the impossible; but he was so surprised when he saw the float within reach, and was so anxious to capture the prize that he did not have time for reflection; nor did he imagine that the line held so large a fish.

"I reckon it's all my fault," said he as the boys came aboard.

"I got a look at it," replied the doctor. "It would have pulled us into the water."

"I reckon it would," put in Owen. "I'll be satisfied with a fish half that size."

"Do catfish get larger than that?" asked Martin.

"'Twas the largest I ever seen in the Ohio; but you git 'em twice that big in the Mississippi."

"How do they land such monsters?" asked Owen, who had thrown himself on the floor to rest after the work and excitement.

"They use gill-hooks as thick as a rifle barrel," was the captain's reply. "When we stop to-night I reckon I kin make one; if it gits in a fish's gill he's a goner."

"Then we can try our luck to-morrow, when we have the hook," said Owen; "I've had enough fishing for one day."

"But what about the floats?" inquired Martin.

"They are keeping up nicely; even if one is lost, it doesn't matter."

"So you are not going out again?"

"Not just now."

"Even if we get another bite?" inquired Martin.

"That depends on how I feel when we get the bite."

"It's 'bout time to start the fire for dinner," put in the captain. "I'll take care of the logs." Lighting his pipe, he sat in the rear of the boat watching the floats, pulling them in one after the other as they drifted near. "It's too hot for the fish to bite," said he as he drew the last line from the water.

Hot it was, and sultry and oppressive. The captain predicted a heavy storm before sunset. Early in the afternoon banks of smoke-gray clouds appeared in the south. As they swept across the sky they were edged with bands of carmine, while lower down on the horizon others arose black and ominous; then the carmine faded and the whole heavens were dark. Far off the knolls were shrouded in mist; the hills near-by were partly obscured; then the big drops danced along the calm water near the shore;—a moment later and the raft was encircled by pelting rain. All that night and the following day and the following night it rained, rained, rained, while down the Ohio drifted the Woodruff.

CHAPTER XII.

A RAINY DAY, BUT FULL OF INTEREST.

WEN held his dripping coat over the fire which he had just kindled. "Aunt Margaret may be able to weave a good blanket," said he, "but she certainly has failed to make a cover that will protect us from such a rain as we had last night."

"It wasn't her fault," answered Martin as he examined the supposed water-proof awning. "Not a drop went through the top; the rain came in along the sides."

"I'm glad to hear it, for I'm afraid that another ducking like last night's would make me sick."

"We'll be ready for the next rain," said Martin. "The wind blew a regular hurricane last night; it would have driven the water through a shingle roof. The cover didn't leak the first night, you know."

"How weak and stiff I am," and Owen limped toward the fire.

When breakfast was over the two boys set to work with their floats. It was damp and disagreeable, but just the day for catfish to be abroad. Mr. Lane had cut a pronged fork from which a rough but strong gill-hook was made,—one that in his opinion would hold the largest fish in the Ohio.

"Why not teach Bounce to fish?" asked Owen as the two were watching a poplar block which they had just thrown overboard.

"The pieces of wood are so large that he could not grab them."

"We can settle that difficulty by fastening short ropes to the end of each float."

"A large fish would pull him under the water," came the second objection.

"Then he can let go until the fish comes to the top again."

Martin, who was always ready to yield to another's suggestion, added, "There is no harm in trying."

"What do you think about it, old fellow?" and Owen looked into the wide, seal-brown eyes of the dog.

"He may be a little weak," said the doctor. "We can at least start to-day for the swim and the exercise will be good for him; he's leading an idle life. But really the wound seems to be entirely healed."

Owen took one of the blocks and holding it in front of Bounce said: "Do you see this, old fellow? Now, don't jump after it when I throw it into the water, but wait until a fish pulls it under,—do you hear? I thought so. When it comes up again grab the short rope which I am nailing to the end and swim to the raft—you understand that, too? I thought you would; still we must give you a little practice."

Bounce stood at the edge of the boat with his front paws resting on the side.

"Bounce, Bounce! ah,— ah — no, no — Bounce, don't jump." Owen cast the float overboard. The dog yelped and looked up into his master's face.

"That's good," and the boy stroked the head of the faithful animal.

The piece of wood was cast into the water several times until at last Bounce was made to understand that he was not to follow it. His lesson was, however, only half finished; the most difficult part still remained. Again the float went into the water and was made to disappear by jerking a cord attached to it.

"Get it, get it!" called out Owen as Martin pulled the poplar stick beneath the surface.

The dog barked and ran restlessly along the side of the boat; then as soon as the log reappeared sprang toward it and brought it to his master.

"That's good, old fellow, now we'll try it again." Owen told Martin to go to the far end of the raft where Bounce could not see him pull the line. As soon as the float disappeared Bounce gave the alarm, standing ready to leap for it when it came to the surface. His quick eye caught sight of it, and he was in the water almost before Owen could discover the place of its disappearance. On the third trial Martin pulled the float beneath the raft; then the boys sat to watch the movements of the dog, who seemed almost frantic with excitement — dancing and barking and pawing the floor, running from one end of the raft to the other, pausing each time to look for the float, until finally it came to the surface.

Bounce proved a docile pupil, and learned his lesson well. For hours he kept his post of duty, seeming to be asleep; but as soon as the block of wood vanished he leaped into the water and started in pursuit. Three small catfish were captured and brought to the raft with but little difficulty; then the dog met an enemy which seemed to worst him in a fair conflict.

"Look, look!" cried Martin, pointing to the place where both the dog and the float had disappeared.

"Has it pulled the dog under?"

"I reckon it has."

"But there he is again."

"There's the block, too."

"See! Bounce is following it."

"There, there! under again, both of them!"

"I'm afraid the fish will drown my dog."

"No danger! Bounce will give up when he gets tired; really I am surprised that he has stood it so long."

"Let us row over there," said Owen.

"No, no! wait; let us see what will happen."

"That's another hundred-pounder," said the captain, taking up his gill-hook. "If that dog brings a cat alongside the boat, it's good-bye catfish."

"The fish is getting tired; it can hold the log under but a few minutes," whispered Owen excitedly.

"See, see! Bounce is swimming and dragging the float after him. Come on, Bounce, old fellow!" said his master.

When close to the boat the captive fish again pulled

the dog beneath the surface. Bounce quickly came to the top, and then shook the water from his head. He was evidently growing tired, and was panting loudly; still he waited for his prize. Up came the log of wood, and with it a huge shovel-fish lying on its back. A shout of triumph went up from the raft. The captain leaned close to the water with the gill-hook in his right hand.

"Great pos-sim-mons!" he exclaimed, "the fish ain't got no gills! he's a shovel-fish!" Mr. Lane tossed the hook back of him on the deck, leaned far out, seized the bony shovel which protruded from the upper jaw of the fish, and threw the strange monster into the middle of the raft.

"That's the biggest I ever saw!" ejaculated Owen.

"Yes, and it could swallow the biggest fish you ever saw," affirmed Martin.

"And Bounce caught it all alone; didn't you, old fellow?" for Owen never failed to praise Bounce when he deserved it. "You shall have a good piece for dinner, and to-night when we land I'll get a squirrel for you."

"Dem fish is gittin' pow'ful big," muttered Noah.

"Look at that shovel," said Martin, still examining the captive. "It is as large as both of my hands."

"Why not keep it for working in the garden?" suggested Owen.

"I'll reckon we'll keep it," said the captain, "and nail it against the raft for good luck."

So much had the boys enjoyed the fishing that they did not notice the drizzling rain which fell without intermission the entire morning. Owen felt a pain in his right side, but he said nothing about it, hoping that it would pass away; but that afternoon he requested the captain to go ashore earlier than usual, so that they could enjoy a walk and squirrel hunt before dark, Mr. Lane consenting, for the crew was not yet accustomed to the constant walking on the hard floor. Besides the future sheriff had another motive for landing, for he had not progressed as rapidly as he had hoped in speech making,—a few disconnected words,—a halt,—a stammer,—this was the only result of each practice. There was but one way of preparing the speech — to write it out and memorize it.

This Mr. Lane resolved to do. Writing paper he had none; but nature had provided a substitute, for the smooth inner surface of the pawpaw which grew in clusters along the banks of the river was in some respects equal to the Egyptian papyrus. It was not flexible and was too thick for ordinary communications, since a score of letters on pawpaw bark would have been a load for a stage; but the weight of the material was not an incumbrance to the captain, for the separate sheets could be hung along the sides of the corn-bins or stored away in some corner.

Late in the afternoon the rain ceased, the sun burst through a rift of amaranth, lit up the wooded banks and somber knobs, and made the river glow until it seemed a stream of fire. A kingfisher rattled away from

a dead branch of a sycamore, then darted with the rapidity of an arrow down into a school of minnows;—a flash, a sputter, then back again to the dead branch, where it cackled glibly as it poised for a second attempt. Close to the water's edge where the boat was anchored grew clusters of wild geraniums; not like their brothers who thrive in the warm sunshine, wearing crowns of pink and red, but delicate children of the forest, seeking the cool recesses of the woods, blooming but a few short weeks, and carpeting the ground with tender leaves and single petals of rose-purple.

Noah was left in charge of the ark, while the others took their rifles and prepared to hunt. Bounce was the first to touch the land. Before the raft had been fastened he leaped out among the geraniums, barked and danced and frightened the belted kingfisher overhead. So bright and warm an afternoon brought out every squirrel of the woods from its hole or nest. What glorious sport the three boatmen enjoyed! They had agreed to shoot the squirrels through the head,—an easy task indeed for the captain; but Martin fired only at short range and when he could rest his rifle against the side of a tree. Owen made several attempts, but failed in all except one—a poor record for the young hero of the Grundy shooting-match.

“Are you sick?” asked Martin.

“Yes, and I'm weak and nervous.”

“Perhaps we had better go back to the raft.”

“No; I hope the walk will be good for me.”

"You haven't looked well all day."

"I've been weak and dizzy; but I thought that the strange feeling would pass away."

"We'll sit here on this log for a minute until Mr. Lane returns." Martin noticed for the first time that Owen was pale and that his hands were trembling.

The captain, who had gone farther down the river in search of the pawpaw thickets, gave a shrill whistle, whereupon the two boys arose and started in the direction of the noise. In the midst of a small clearing, in front of a log cabin, stood Mr. Lane conversing with one whose appearance was so odd that the two new arrivals could with difficulty suppress a laugh. The stranger was low of stature and of slender build, with a long black beard and a heavy growth of hair, but the hair was white and was caught up behind and tied with a faded red ribbon. He wore a shirt with a ruffled bosom and breeches that reached to his knees and were fastened with shining clasps. His low shoes, though torn and rusty, were also ornamented with large, bright buckles,—a strange dress for a Western trapper!

"And these are your two companions," said the man to the captain as the two boys approached. "And their names are——?"

"Martin Cooper and Owen Howard," replied Mr. Lane.

"My name is Haywood." He took each boy by the hand and gave him a hearty welcome. "Just let them wait here," he continued, addressing the captain; "you

and myself will go and bring the raft down to the landing. Just step into the house there, boys; I'm the only one living here, for my partner has gone to New Orleans. Don't be afraid of the animals! How happy I am to receive visitors in this lonely spot!"

The restless little stranger was all excitement; it was evident that he was delighted to have the party visit him and break the monotony of his quiet life.

The two men started up the river, while the boys walked slowly toward the hunter's log cabin. It stood on a slight elevation about four hundred feet from the river, with a small door in the middle and a window of no mean proportions on either side. The upper half of each window contained four small panes of glass; the lower part was constructed of rough boards. The chinks were not of bits of wood, as was used in such houses, but of pieces of stone of varied shapes and colors. In other respects it did not differ from the common log hut of the Western trapper, save, perhaps, that it was larger and the roof more pointed.

But what did Mr. Haywood mean by telling them not to be afraid of the animals? As Owen was weak and walked slowly, Martin ran ahead to investigate.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOUSE OF "JACK AND THE BEAN STALK."

OWEN! Owen! Come quickly! It's full of birds,—dozens of them—and all kinds of animals! a real Noah's ark!" exclaimed Martin as he entered the house of the trapper.

"I never heard of drying bird-skins," answered Owen dubiously, for he concluded that Martin had seen nothing more than a few pelts which the trapper was curing in his hut.

"Come and see them; they look just as natural as when alive."

"What do you mean? only a few old fox-skins, I suppose."

"No, they are not stretched and nailed against the wall; some are flying, some standing, some on their nests."

Owen was surprised at Martin's strange words. What could it all mean? As he entered the cabin he beheld a sight which sent through him a thrill of joy. If suddenly transported to a fairy-land he could not have been more delighted or amazed; for before him were birds of every kind: golden orioles arched their necks as if ready to sing, and scarlet tanagers trimmed their

brilliant plumage; blue-birds swayed to and fro on slender willow branches; a butcher-bird watched with cruel delight a sparrow which it had pinioned to a thorn; flickers and woodpeckers clung tenaciously to dead branches where they made their nests; a large barred-owl stared at him, and a powerful hawk with poised wings soared away with a chicken in its talons; two kingfishers sat on a sycamore branch, one ready to dive in quest of minnows and the other feeding on the prey it had captured; mocking-birds and thrushes, rain-crows and sandpipers and wee little humming-birds. Who had brought them here? What hand had so imitated the work of nature? Had life left those delicate forms? Could they not fly away and gladden the quiet sunset with melodious song? How strange! How enchanting the scene! The two boys had crossed the threshold of a simple trapper's hut and had entered a land of beauty and of wonderment.

"As natural as if alive!" exclaimed Owen, pointing toward a group of squirrels, one of which was resting on its hind legs and holding an acorn in its mouth; a second climbing a small tree, and a third peeping out from a hole between two rocks.

Just then both boys were startled, for before them a wildcat, which had been sleeping on the floor, raised its head and stared at them with its great, round eyes, as if to say: "I at least am alive."

Martin and Owen edged toward the door, but they saw at a glance that the animal was a young one. Then

it gave a piteous cry like the whimper of an infant and crawled toward them. At the same time one of the mocking-birds above shook its dull-brown body, arched its wings until the pure white of the under part was visible, raised its grey, slender neck and poured forth a wild, harmonious roulade that aroused within the boys an ecstasy of delight; then the leaping, bounding cataract of notes died away and the soft, musical cadences of the meadow lark were heard; then the softer, softer oodle-oodle of the jay-bird, the merry whistle of the cardinal, the twitter of the blue-bird, the rich, full call of the brown-thrush, the sad, sweet lay of the oriole, the gorgeous strains of the tanager; then a discordant medley; then a rapid flight of notes, with the last so clear and high that it seemed as if its little life had gone out on wings of song.

The boys had noticed in the meantime that the bird was a prisoner in a small cage made of slender branches; they did not stir until the voice was hushed, then both clapped their hands so loud that the songster flew restlessly against the side of its narrow house, and the young wildcat retreated to the farther end of the room; while at the same time two big eyes of a screech-owl appeared at the opening of a hollow log which hung against the side of the hut.

"I do believe the place is haunted," said Owen as he watched the two eyes open and glare at him, then slowly close and sink into the hollow tree with all the regularity of an automaton.

"Just as wonderful as the house in the story of 'Jack and the Bean Stalk,'" rejoined Martin.

"And almost as dangerous," put in Owen. "I am going to see whether this large wildcat is alive."

"Oh, he's dead!"

"How do you know?"

"I watched him as soon as I came into the room."

"And I watched the small cat and the birds, and concluded that they were all dead."

"Well, if that cat had been alive we would have been forced to use our rifles."

"They really seem to be alive," said Owen.

Soon the trapper and Mr. Lane appeared at the door, and as the former had learned from Mr. Lane of Owen's wonderful feat with his rifle at the Kentucky shooting-match and at the stage robbery, and was himself an ardent admirer of marksmanship, he came at once to congratulate his young visitor.

"Where did you get all these beautiful birds?" asked Martin.

"From the woods."

"We know, sir; but who stuffed them and made them look like live birds?"

"And can't you teach us to fix them in this way?" asked Owen.

"It's not my work," said the trapper; and, seating himself near Owen, he went on to tell the boys how he came in possession of so wonderful a collection. For many years a merchant in Philadelphia, engaged in

supplying emigrant wagons which started West, his health failed and he resolved to visit those sections of the country which lay beyond the Alleghanies in hopes that the roaming life and salubrious climate would restore to him his former strength. He accompanied a man by the name of Audubon, who wished to make a collection of all the birds in the states bordering on the Ohio River.

Mr. Haywood, for such was the host's name, gave the visitors an interesting account of the famous ornithologist and his work; how he would sit for hours watching the birds building their nests or listening to their songs; how when a new kind was caught he would examine it most carefully, noting the color of each separate part, measuring the length of its wings and legs, the size of its head and back, until he had a most minute description of the little creature. The two men had spent a year at this task, preserving four of each kind of bird or animal, two male and two female; half of them Audubon had taken to New Orleans, leaving his companion in charge of the rest until the fall, when they were to go together to New York. Mr. Haywood acknowledged, however, that he was growing tired of the secluded life, and almost regretted that he had promised to remain so long alone. He thought seriously of accompanying the party down the Mississippi and sailing thence to New York.

"What will become of the birds if you leave them?" asked Martin.

"It isn't probable that anyone will steal them," replied the custodian; "but the mice or other rodents may destroy some; at least I judge so from our past experience, for in the beginning we stored the specimens away in a small house built for the purpose, but soon found it necessary to remove them here, where we could watch them. Audy — that's what I always call the naturalist — Audy would be angry with me for leaving all his beautiful birds, for they cost him many long hours of labor."

"When will the feller be back here?" asked the captain.

"Not until September. He could make it by the first of August, but it is too warm to row up the river during July."

"Then he can come with us," replied Martin.

"And can teach us how to make a collection of birds," said Owen in a tone of voice that showed how pleased he was.

Although the birds were not the property of Mr. Haywood and he even thought of abandoning them, yet it was evident that he took great interest in this mummy-flock. He went from one object to another, giving the history of each, for every one seemed to have a special history. There were humming-birds which it took weeks to catch. It was easy enough to kill them with a shotgun, but then they were so mangled and torn that it was impossible to mount them. Finally the ornithologist hit upon a plan that succeeded admirably: removing the

pith from a straight elder-stick, he made a blowgun, from which he shot balls of hard clay. With these balls he could kill the birds without mangling their bodies. How difficult it was to find the nests of sand-pipers; one could walk along the beds of glittering sand for hours, with the affrighted pipers overhead so close that they could be struck with a walking-cane, and by their whirling motion indicating that the nests were just below, beneath one's feet; yet the wee, speckled, cream-colored eggs seemed invisible to the human eye!

"And did you find any?" asked Owen.

"Two, just two, but since Audy went away I found a dozen nests holding in all more than forty eggs; I have them here in a box," said he taking from a bracket hung between a forked stick a small case made of cotton wood and divided into sections. "But I'll never forget the day we dug for the kingfisher's eggs," he continued. "It was a hot day with the sun overhead. Audy and I took our pick and shovel to dig down four feet to the nest which was in the side of a perpendicular bank. The work could be finished in less than an hour, he said, for the soil was soft and the nest not more than a yard within the hill. As Audy was supposed to know all about nests, I believed his statement, although I had my doubts about the soft ground; for I had rowed beneath the bank a few days before and as far as my recollection went had noticed a hard, gravelly formation. Well, when we came near the spot, there just above the nest sat the proprietor, who seemed to be a little

curious and came down to one of the lower limbs to watch our movements. We dug our pick and shovel into the ground; it was not in the least soft, for just below the surface we struck a layer of limestone which had been concealed by the soil washing over the edge. The shovel was laid aside, but the pick worked on. Soon we began to perspire, the proprietor in the meantime drawing closer and closer and becoming more and more interested in our work. Finally, we worked our way through the layer of rocks and were getting close to the nest, when Audy toppled over the bank and disappeared beneath the surface of the water, while the kingfisher fairly cackled with delight;—but it's getting late, boys. I'll finish the rest after supper."

"Please, sir, let us hear it now," pleaded Martin, who had become very much interested in the simple narrative.

"Yes, sir; tell it all, we'll wait for supper," demanded Owen, forgetting for the nonce that he was weak, for there was something pleasing and attractive in the trapper's speech. He never used the word "reckon" or "tolerable," and his "A's" were pronounced in such a long, deliberate way, just as Father Byrne pronounced them.

"It's a long story about nothing," continued the trapper, fingering the tiny ovals in the box before him.

"Well, Audy was a good swimmer, or it would have been the last of him; as it was, he pulled for the shore and went with me to dinner and to get a change of clothes. Back to the place we started as soon as the meal was

finished; this time I carried my rifle, determined to take revenge on that kingfisher. Would you believe it? I fired and missed him! missed him, and not ten feet away! I did as sure as William Penn was an honest man! And the kingfisher? why he didn't even fly! Sat there as if nothing had happened! Simply turned his head when he heard the bullet whizz by! When we began to work he began to clatter, and the faster we dug the faster he rattled his tongue. Audy said it was a good sign, for it showed that there were eggs in the nest. I really thought that the hole would reach to the middle of the state. But it didn't; we came to the end at last! What do you think we found? A handful of sticks; not an egg! But the kingfisher! boys, you should have heard the kingfisher! He saw that we were fooled, saw it just as well as a human being! The way he laughed and cackled and clattered and carried on; and then he flew down the river to tell his wife all about the joke!"

Here Haywood looked at Owen, who seemed to be getting tired of the story, and noticing that the lad was very pale he leaned over to take the boy's hand; but at the first touch he started back and exclaimed: "My lad, you have the chills, — slight touch of the malaria,— not a bad attack, though,— a short rest will put you on your feet again." He paused; then bent forward to feel Owen's brow. "There! there goes my head!" he cried. How the visitors laughed! Mr. Haywood was suddenly transformed into a different being, so at least it seemed. His white wig had fallen off revealing a head that was

entirely bald. The trapper enjoyed the situation as much as his young friends.

He began at once to prepare for supper; started a fire in the huge chimney-place, sent Martin to the raft for some rye-coffee, ordered Mr. Lane to clean four squirrels, flitted around like a busy housewife, and all the while chatted with Owen until the latter in his interest forgot that he was sick.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FIRST ALLIGATOR.

GEE, gosh! if dat ain't one, I gib in!"

Mose, who was sitting alone on the raft, leaped to his feet and seized a rifle. There was no mistake,—a real alligator was slowly swimming up the stream. What a monster, too! Its head raised high above the water glancing right and left in quest of prey. On it came! Would it be safe to wait and encounter the enemy? Surely so large an animal could climb into the raft! and if he missed or only wounded it, would it not devour him? Perhaps it was safer to seek refuge in the branches of a tree! Mose retreated foot by foot toward the end of the raft,—there he paused, with his big eyes riveted upon the approaching object. What long legs and feet it had! and its head, was it that of a fish or a wild beast? How regularly the legs rose and fell as the monster swam forward! What! The negro bent forward and peered down the current until his round eyes seemed bursting from their sockets, for the terrible alligator was slowly evolving into a canoe. Yes, a canoe it was, and in it a single rower. A smile of joy came over the negro's face; from ear to ear it

extended as Mose resumed his place and awaited the arrival of the small craft.

"Tiens te v'la," said the stranger, rowing up to the side of the raft.

"Ha!" Mose wondered why he did not understand the salutation, a common one among Canadian frontiersmen.

"Wet day! fine for fishing — I'm out to try my luck." The man pointed to half a dozen floats in the bottom of his canoe.

"You looked kinder allergader like," replied Mose.

"Don't understand — like an alligator, you say?"

"Kinder! I seed de paddles chuckin' up an' chuckin' down, an' I said, 'dem's his legs,' an' I seed de nose ob de skiff stickin' out, an' I said, 'he's jes' smellin' 'round fur to git me,' so I gibbed in an' wuz goin' to git up a tree. Dey's been foolin' me 'bout dem allergaders."

"That so? where are the others?"

"Dey's gone huntin'."

"How many are with you?"

"Free 'sides me. Dar's de cap'ain — dat's Massar Lane — you'se heard ob him, ain't you?"

"No."

"He's de biggest man in de state, an' he used fur to be de shootin'est till Massar Owen beat 'im."

"Do you mean Coon-Hollow Jim?"

"Dat's him!"

A look of disappointment came over the fisherman's face, for the giant marksman's fame had reached Botland.

"So Coon-Hollow Jim is with you — and who are the other two?"

"Dar's Massar Owen; he's de one who outshot de cap'ain."

"Both of them! the two best shots in the state!" muttered the man, unable to conceal his displeasure.

"Ya, sir; Massar Owen, de chile, he's sick, but Massar Martin ain't."

"Martin? Who's he?"

"He's Massar Owen's fust cousin! Can't shoot like Owen kin, but he don't miss nuffin on de fly."

"Yes, and I can't fly," thought the man as he came closer and stepped on the raft.

Antoine Guibeau, for such was the stranger's name, was a native of France, of some education, speaking English accurately and with but little foreign accent. Engaged in the fur trade for years, his dishonest transactions with both Indians and French having forced him to leave Quebec, he settled in Vincennes and later at Botland, where he earned a livelihood by building pirogues for use on the Ohio and Mississippi. He was of low stature, with full, round face, thick, jet-black hair, and pearly teeth; was lame in the right leg from the effects of a rifle ball received, as he related, in a skirmish with the Indians, although several of his acquaintances affirmed that he was shot while attempting to rob a furrier's camp in Illinois.

"J'ai peur à ma peau! (I am afraid of my skin).
"J'ai peur à ma peau!" he repeated as he limped across

the deck of the raft, for the man was a coward and, as much as he desired to enrich himself at the expense of others, he could not make up his mind to enter upon so perilous a mission. Still he had accomplished his mission; he could report that the Woodruff was within fifteen miles of Botland, heavily laden, and manned by three of Kentucky's best marksmen.

"So you thought that I was an alligator," said he, stepping from the raft into his light canoe.

"You chucked up an' down jes' like one."

"So you've seen them."

"No, massar; jes' heard 'bout 'em."

"They are not dangerous; when you get to New Orleans you should take a hunt."

"Sc-u-u-se me!" replied Mose, frightened at the very suggestion of such an experience.

"Let me tell you how it's done."

"Dar ain't no use tellin' me, caze you'se jes' losin' time."

"You often find them sleeping along the river bank where you can get very close to them——"

"Massar, you's losin' time. Dar ain't no use tellin' me, caze I gib in."

Antoine did not grasp the force of the last expression, but he could with difficulty restrain his laughter as he beheld the serious countenance of the negro. He continued: "The big, lazy monsters have their mouths wide open——" Mose started backward——"you can get close to them and stick a rifle barrel down their throats."

"I done tole you, done tole you, I gib in — don't want to heah nuffin' 'bout huntin' allergaders!"

"But listen!" urged Guibeau. "You can shoot their eyes out and then they can't find you."

"Won't shoot nuffin'! won't hunt nuffin'!" contended Mose.

The report of a rifle was heard in the forest nearby, so Antoine hastened to depart for Botland before the return of the crew.

Close to the river's edge in Botland stood a large, log structure with a wide porch and two ample doors. It was a tavern, post-office, drug-shop, grocery, and general rendezvous, and here at any time of night or day could be found a group of lounging whites and Indians.

Apart from the idle crowd and seated on a rough bench near the tavern were Cyrus Appleway and Coil Sanders, awaiting the return of the Frenchman whom they had taken as an associate in their scheme for robbing the Woodruff. It was at Appleway's suggestion that Antoine Guibeau had been received as a partner, there being two reasons for admitting this third member. In the first place Guibeau was the owner of a pirogue suited for the navigation of the Ohio and Mississippi, secondly it was feared that Coil's attempt at stealing the raft would keep Captain Lane on his guard during the whole voyage; hence the necessity of a sufficient force to attack the Woodruff openly. Cyrus, having resolved to appropriate the entire proceeds from the sale of the cargo, was convinced that he could outwit the two accomplices after

throwing upon them the danger and the burden of the work.

"Ja'i peur à ma peau," were the greeting words of Antoine, who, upon reaching the town, went at once to report the success of his mission.

"Did you find it?" was the curt reply of Cyrus, who seemed to disregard the salutation of the Frenchman.

"Strong crew," said Guibeau.

"So Lane did bring help; I knew he would suspect you." As Appleway spoke he grasped his long white beard and turned toward Sanders with a reproachful, disappointed look.

"J'ai peur à ma peau,—dangerous crew! dangerous crew!" continued the late arrival.

"How far up the river?" asked Coil.

"Fifteen miles."

"Then they will pass to-morrow."

"Yes."

"And how many are on the raft?"

"Four."

"I guessed there were a dozen from the way you spoke at first," said Cyrus Appleway, rising to his feet and pulling his beard. "And two of them are boys—who is the fourth?" he demanded.

"The blackest African I ever saw!"

"Then the number has not been increased! why, man, why did you call the crew a dangerous one?"

"They can all shoot!"

"So can we!"

"But they are the best in Kentucky!"

"But the boys don't count, and the negro don't count; they'll get frightened as soon as they hear or see us!"

"An' when it comes to shootin' I'm good as any Kintuc!" boasted Coil.

"Then I may lose my pirogue," objected the Frenchman.

"Well, we've got to settle this affair and settle it to-night," insisted the whiskered leader. "The raft passes to-morrow, and we must be able to follow it. To do this we need a large canoe or pirogue, so just let us know what you intend to do."

"Vous n'êtes pas peur m' enjôler" (you cannot entrap me).

"Confound your French! Are you coming?"

Guibeau squirmed and limped up and down in front of the two men, then pausing, and shaking his hands in parallel motion in front of his face he repeated: "J'ai peur à ma peau! vous n'êtes pas peur m' enjôler!"

"That means he's going to join us! Come into the tavern and let us have a drink of brandy." Cyrus led the way, Coil followed, and Antoine limped slowly after them.

The loungers around the tavern dropped away one by one as the night wore on, but the three conspirators drank and talked long after the others had departed, and so interested were they in their scheme that they did not notice a stranger, who, on entering and catching a few words, drew closer to hear more of the conversation.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END OF THE HOUSE OF "JACK AND THE BEAN STALK."

OWEN and Martin were sleeping within the trapper's hut; Mose was stretched upon the hard floor of the raft; on a fallen tree near the river the captain and Mr. Haywood were engaged in earnest conversation.

"The boy's attack may be a serious one," argued the latter. "I know something about these malarial fevers, for when I practiced medicine in Philadelphia I treated many such cases. You must take them in time. Now, let the boys stay here with me for two days. You can start early in the morning and float down with the Woodruff. My large canoe is a good one; we can follow you in it and overtake you in a short time."

"So you are coming with us?"

"Yes; I have decided to do so. I find this solitary life so very hard. I have often regretted that I offered to stay here all alone and see to Audubon's specimens. But to return to the boy: to-morrow morning I shall row down to Botland and see what I can get in the way of medicine. If I succeed in getting it, I hope to have

the youngster ready to start in two days. Of course it would be the best thing all around if you could only stay here with the raft."

"Can't do that," objected the captain at once.

"I don't say you will risk the boy's life by forcing him to start; still it is wrong to take chances. The boys may not like to remain alone, so it is better not to tell them until you are gone; I shall see you off at day-light, then break the news to the youngsters and go for the medicine."

After some discussion the two men walked slowly toward the river, leaving the boys in possession of the cabin.

"Another arrangement occurs to me," resumed Haywood, whose fertile mind seemed filled with devices. "It may be more satisfactory for all of us. Suppose I take my light boat and start for Botland at once. I may then be able to return before daybreak. No! scarcely that soon; but at any rate I shall get back before the boys begin to worry about the matter. In that case you start at daybreak, as I have already suggested; we will probably meet before you make a good mile."

"I can go down with you in the skiff."

"Not at all necessary; I am a good oarsman and can make the trip in the time I stated. If you were with me and we met with some accident to delay us you might lose half a day."

As the captain agreed to follow this last plan, Mr. Haywood prepared to start at once.

"Good-night," said he as he stepped into the light craft.

"Good-night." The trapper's canoe disappeared down the stream.

The captain was soon fast asleep. Martin, too, within the cabin enjoyed a peaceful rest and dreamed of bright-winged birds. Throughout the night Owen was feverish and restless; it was almost dawn when he fell into a deep slumber. When he awoke, Martin was not there. Everything in the cabin seemed familiar; the mocking-bird was singing a soft, sorrowful tune, while his feathery associates seemed to be waiting for their turn to pour forth the morning carol.

"Owen! Owen! the raft is gone! I can't find Mr. Lane!" exclaimed Martin bursting into the room. So excited was he that he could scarcely speak. Owen leaped from his bed.

"Wait, wait," demanded Martin, grasping the boy as he sprang toward the door. "How pale you are; I frightened you; wait and let me tell you; I have gone up and down the river for half a mile. Can't find any signs of it!"

"Let me look for it."

"No, no!"

"Perhaps the trapper stole it and Mr. Lane is following him," stammered Owen.

"It's gone; that's all I can say."

"And what can we do?"

"Let us wait; the captain may come back."

"I reckon we'll have to wait. In fact, Mart, I'm so dizzy that I can scarcely stand. But I am not sick; I've had a good rest. You frightened me when you rushed in,—perhaps that made me dizzy." Owen seated himself on a stool near the door.

"That's right! rest there while I cook some breakfast," said Martin.

"But I am cook."

"Yes; when we are on the raft."

"The raft, the raft!" repeated Owen, "where can it be?"

"It may have gotten loose again," suggested Martin, in a calmer tone, for he wished to prove that he was no longer excited over the mishap. "I expect to see the captain here in less than an hour, telling us that he caught the raft about a mile down the river."

"But he and the trapper and Mose slept on the Woodruff last night; how could it get away without their knowing it?" objected Owen.

The new cook seemed too busy to answer this difficulty. For a while there was a silence,—the mocking-bird sang overhead and the fire roared up the spacious chimney.

Martin was the first to speak.

"That raft has gone down the river. Even if it started early last night it can't be far. We can catch it in less than eight hours."

"But have we a skiff?"

"Yes; it belongs to the trapper—ours is not there."

"Then, Mart, let us take breakfast and start."

"There is one great difficulty in the way."

"What?"

"I am afraid, Owen, that you will take sick again in the hot sun. You were not well yesterday and are looking so pale this morning."

"Nonsense!" replied the boy, making an effort to brace up. "I never felt better; I have entirely recovered. I'll just walk slowly to the river to get a good appetite for that squirrel you are cooking."

Down to the river bank he walked, where he sat and watched the numerous killdees flitting by over the surface of the water. Ah, thought he, if I only had my rifle I could soon prove that my nerves are steady; if I can show Martin but a single one of these birds which I have brought down on the wing,—then,—then he will believe that I have entirely recovered! Back to the hut he went; took his rifle and crept away; never was he happier than in the forest with his rifle balanced upon his arm or swung upon his shoulder. It was to him a real friend. Again he stood upon the elevated bank and watched the fleeting marks, which were scarcely visible so fast they scurried by and so like the dark current was their slender, grayish-brown bodies. To follow them in their flight would have been impossible had it not been for their unremitting cries and their white breasts. As they came in sight the boy raised his rifle to his shoulder, covered the birds for an instant, then lowered it again until finally, when this exercise had been repeated several times, he resolved to risk a shot.

The sharp echo rang out in the still morning. Had he hit the mark? The bird seemed to swerve to one side,—but had it fallen? Owen could not tell. He would wait for one that was higher in the air, then he could see plainly whether he had killed it or not. Past him the killdees continued to sail; then came one above the rest, screaming as it darted by,—up went the rifle, crack, and down went the fated bird to the water. The marksman turned and ran to the cabin.

“Mart! Mart!” he called out, “I am not sick! I can shoot on the wing; come and see me, then you will say that I am entirely well!”

“Just wait a moment; let us have breakfast first!”

“I’ll get more wood, you haven’t enough,” replied Owen, anxious to show that he had strength left for work.

Putting down his rifle, he ran to a pile of cordwood, where he intended to get as much as he could carry; but he seemed to be disappointed with the quality of the firewood which the trapper had provided, for he walked around the pile half a dozen times, occasionally picking up a stick and as quickly casting it aside.

“What’s the matter?” asked Martin, walking toward the spot.

“Nothing but sycamore,” replied Owen, “not a piece of wood in the whole pile that will burn.”

“It is easy to see that the man was raised in the city,” said Martin.

"Well, I reckon it is! Whoever heard of using a sycamore for fire-wood?"

"The fellow must have cut it and then found that it wasn't good for cooking."

"Just it! that's the reason he has so much."

"But you mustn't do any work," expostulated Martin.

"Why not?"

"I'm the doctor, and I tell you that you are to take a rest."

"Bringing up the subject again, Mart! I am as well as I ever was in my life and I'll prove it to you when we get to the river."

After enjoying a breakfast on fried squirrel the two boys started toward the river.

"If I kill four birds in four shots, you'll agree that I am entirely well; will you not?" asked Owen.

"Yes."

"And if I am well I can make the trip?"

"Yes."

"Then if I kill the four birds we'll take the small boat of the trapper and start down the river after the party."

Martin paused, thought for a moment, then assented to the proposal.

The few killdees still continued to sail by high above the water and were plainly visible; yet they could not be called an easy mark so small were their bodies and so rapid their flight. Only the most experienced marksman would have thought it possible to bring them down;

such was the slender lad who stood on the bank of the broad stream that morning ready to prove to his companion that his eye was true and his nerve was steady. Three shots were fired and as many birds were killed; but, alas, for the last shot! a feather was cut from the wing of the killdeer, but the bird flew on until it was lost in the green foliage.

"You see that last shot was an accident!" claimed Owen, resting his rifle upon the ground and turning to his friend. "All an accident; I can shoot as well as I did last fall at the shooting-match."

"I reckon you can do well! In fact you have surprised me. I really did not expect to see you hit a bird."

Suddenly their attention was attracted by the appearance of a red streak across the river and looking back they beheld the cabin in flames.

"A sycamore spark!" exclaimed Owen.

"Just what did it! those sycamore sticks!" put in Martin as he started in a run toward the blazing hut.

"Save the mocking-bird," called out Owen following close behind his companion.

"We must save our clothes first," replied Martin.

A glance showed the boys that the hut itself was doomed. A coal from the fire-place had been cast out and lodged below a window which faced toward the river; the whole window was now ablaze and the flame was spreading to the roof. As they drew near they saw the mocking-bird escape through the southern window with a wild scream; for when it felt the intense

heat it beat so madly against the sides of its cage that the piece of bark with which it was suspended from the roof was broken and the cage falling to the floor was shattered, liberating its prisoner. The barred-owl followed the mocking-bird.

Crawling in through this window the boys succeeded in getting together a few cooking utensils and all their clothes, Owen holding up an old quilt in front of Martin while the latter collected the objects considered the most valuable. But the heat soon forced them to leave the place; they tried to take the young wild-cat with them, but in its frenzied state it attacked them when they approached and finally with a wild cry leaped into the flames. The boys turned with a shudder from the sight.

"Now what are we to do?" asked Martin as they stood at a short distance, watching the ever-increasing conflagration.

"As soon as the cabin has burned to the ground, we'll take our little boat and leave the place," replied Owen.

"Must we return home?"

"Why home?"

"Owen, I am so afraid that you will be sick again!"

"Martin," affirmed the lad, "I am going down the river until I find the raft."

"What will the trapper say about his birds?"

"I don't care what he says; he should have stayed and taken care of them; but, look!" cried he, "the roof is falling in."

"Yes, that's the last of the house of 'Jack and the

Bean Stalk,' " said Martin as he saw the flame and smoke leap out through the glowing rafters and shingles. In less than half an hour only a few charred and smouldering logs could be seen where stood the enchanted home of the trapper; and before another half hour had passed a small boat with two boys, one of whom sat at the rudder while the other plied the oars, was gliding down the Ohio.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAN WITH A WHITE FLAG.

LISTEN! Owen, listen!" and Martin released his hold on the oars and let them trail in the water beside the boat.

"There must be a settler's house near-by," was the reply.

"I don't see any path leading from the woods," said Martin.

"Settler's house or not," replied Owen, "one thing is certain, there is a settler near-by and he wants everybody in the state to know it."

"Hear him yell," put in Martin.

"He must be mad; don't let us land until we see who it is."

"Good heavens, Owen, don't you know that voice?" and Martin started from his seat.

"No, whose?"

"I know it!"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes; listen again."

"Mr. Lane's," exclaimed Owen after a short pause. And Mr. Lane's it was. He was practicing his political

speech to be given at the Cross-Roads in October, and thinking that he was alone he shouted until the wooded banks reëchoed his stentorian voice. When he had practiced before the boys he could repeat but a few broken sentences, but with no one before him he was confident, he could fix his mind on his speech and speak straight ahead, as Squire Grundy was accustomed to do. He gave the account of the stage robbery, the capture of Louis Bowen and the famous whisky-cave, the finding of the mark on Stayford's pistol; he affirmed that if elected he would be ready to do his work, rain or shine, hot or cold, winter or summer,—pronouncing these antithetical words with much deliberation, in imitation of the Squire, from whom he had learned them.

"Let us cheer," whispered Owen as the speaker paused for a few seconds.

"No, no!" objected Martin, as he pulled the boat close to the shore, "wait until he finishes."

"What could have brought him back?"

"We can soon find out, but don't interrupt him, for he will come to the end of his speech in a short time."

"It is lucky that we put in here for dinner," said Owen, "otherwise we might have missed him and the boat."

"Not while he was yelling in that way; did you ever hear such a voice?"

"Never! the people at the Cross-Roads will have no difficulty in understanding him."

"I reckon not; and he speaks as well if not better

than the Squire, and far better than Mudd ever could."

"But the Squire uses longer words."

"Yes, that is true; but if the captain continues to improve and add to his speech he will talk longer than the Squire does,—the length, you know, counts for a tol'able lot."

Again the speaker paused and again Owen prepared to applaud, but Martin still insisted that they should wait for the end.

"Why, he is giving his speech over a second time," asserted Owen, after listening patiently for some minutes.

"This is the first chance he has had to practise alone."

"Mart! I want to hear about the boat. He has more than five months to practice his speech."

"And you have five months to hear about the Woodruff; wait just a few minutes more."

Here the speaker returned to the end of his speech, a part of which he had evidently forgotten. He insisted over and over again that he had not dodged the bullet when the bandit fired at him; that he wanted the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; that the Squire was wrong and had not been told the true story of the robber and the bullet; that he wanted the office of Sheriff of Nelson County, but he didn't want to get it by deceiving the people.

"I reckon he'll never stop," whispered Owen as he listened to the repetition of the episode of the bullet. This the captain evidently considered an important part of his speech; he was pleased, too, with his progress

and had no intention of making his practice a short one.

Finally the boys stepped out on the shore and crept close to the speaker, where they could not only hear him but see his every motion, being separated from him by a willow which leaned out over the water. Just how long Mr. Lane would have spoken it is difficult to say; but his speech was brought to an abrupt termination by one of his listeners stepping on a dry twig which snapped with a noise that attracted his attention. Quick as a flash he drew his heavy horse-pistol from a belt at his side and covered the part of the tree from which the noise came.

"Don't shoot."

"Mr. Lane! Mr. Lane!"

"Don't shoot! don't shoot!" came the cry as the boys jumped from behind the willow in full view of the orator so suddenly transformed into a dangerous enemy.

"Great pos-sim-mons!" ejaculated the old marksman; "I reckon you just yelled in time, for I thought I seen a wild-cat behind that willow tree!"

"Where is the raft?" asked Martin.

"And Mr. Haywood?" queried Owen.

"The raft is safe!"

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the two lads.

"But Mr. Haywood," continued the captain, "I don't know what to say, boys; I reckon something's wrong." He then told them briefly about the agreement of the previous evening, and added: "When the trapper didn't come back, I jus' stopped the raft, and concluded I'd

come and git you; then I know you will be safe."

"Why did you pull in here, Mr. Lane?" inquired Owen.

"Just wanted to try that speech all alone."

"I reckon you speak almost as well as the Squire," alleged Martin.

The orator was pleased and encouraged by this flattering assertion. He went on to explain that the trapper was going, or at least had promised to go, with them to New Orleans, leaving the birds to take care of themselves for a few months.

"They don't need anyone to take care of them," answered Martin.

"No," added Owen; "if that was the only thing keeping the trapper he is now a free man."

"Anything happen, boys?"

"Nothing much," replied Martin with a laugh.

"We burned the house down, that's all," remarked Owen with seeming indifference.

"You done that? Ah, boys!"

"But it was an accident, Mr. Lane; all an accident; we put some sycamore sticks into the fireplace and then went off to the river, and a few minutes later we looked back and saw the cabin on fire." Here Martin paused and blew upon the fire which he was trying to enkindle, "I believe this is sycamore," he continued, "at least it burns like it."

"Let us wait until we reach the Woodruff," suggested Owen, for whom Martin was preparing a drink of coffee.

"No, you said you wanted it; besides it is going to rain all day and you will need it to keep you warm."

"I reckon the man 'll feel tol'ably bad when he larns 'bout the house, but it couldn't be helped, so he'll have to grin and bear it," said the captain.

No one could explain why Mr. Haywood had not returned to his cabin as he had promised; still there was no great anxiety or alarm about it, for Botland would soon be reached and there the trapper would be called to account for not keeping his word.

The party soon turned the boats down the stream, the captain keeping the canoe which belonged to the Woodruff and the boys remaining in the one which Mr. Haywood had left behind. After a short row they reached the place where the Woodruff was moored.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted Owen as he leaped on the deck, followed by Bounce.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" replied Martin. "We will stay on the old boat this time until we reach New Orleans."

"Now you's been runnin' 'way!" were Noah's words of greeting. "I ain't goin' to stay no mo' on dis ark by myself; no I ain't, 'cause I gits right smart scar'd."

"We won't leave you again," affirmed the cook.

"'Deed I'se glad fur to see you, honey. I jes' felt awful bad when Massar Lane lef' you."

Owen took shelter from the drizzling rain beneath the awning, where he was joined by Martin. "Mr. Lane has just given me another reason why he started back to get us," began the latter.

"What was it?"

"It seems that when we were hunting and left Mose with the raft a man came up in a skiff from Botland and asked all kinds of questions about the Woodruff — wanted to know how many were on it, and so forth and so on."

"Does the captain fear that the fellow will rob us?" asked the cook.

"He says he is going to watch the fellow and also Mr. Haywood; but of course Mr. Lane never gets scared. But see!" he exclaimed. "There is a man waving a white flag and the captain is getting into the skiff to tow us ashore."

The raft was approaching Botland. A group of children came trooping down to the shore followed by some of the older settlers.

"Dat's him," whispered Noah to the captain, pointing to the man with the flag.

"Halloo! alligator — Tiens te v'la!" shouted the man to Noah, for it was Antoine Guibeau. As the raft drew nearer, he turned and addressed the captain: "I hailed you for I have a message from a certain Mr. Haywood. He wishes me to inform you that he has changed his mind and will not go to New Orleans on your raft."

"Can't he come down an' tell me?"

"That's his business. He wanted you to go back to his cabin for the two boys, but I see they are with you. That's all I have to say!" Antoine threw the white flag into the river and limped up the bank.

"We'll leave Haywood's skiff here," called out the captain. Guibeau turned and looked around, but said nothing.

A few of the settlers made remarks about the fine craft and heavy cargo; but Mr. Lane was not disposed to enter into conversation. He and Mose poled the raft out into the current.

"Boys!" came the warning voice of the captain, when some distance from shore, "you've been praying to git this ark to New Orleans; but I reckon you'll have to pray and shoot, too, for Haywood's gone back on us, and that lame critter is in with him."

CHAPTER XVII.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE four days spent in drifting from the Wabash to the Mississippi were uneventful. The range of hills and the distant knobs with their tree-capped heads, indistinct in the blue horizon, grew less prominent as the days went by, until they were succeeded by the low, monotonous grass-covered plains to the right, and to the left by swampy and almost impervious woods. Oaks and hickories and beeches and walnuts almost entirely vanished, while in their place grew giant poplars and cotton trees, around which huge grape-vines entwined themselves and spread and grew and ramified until the whole forest seemed a tangled network of monstrous creepers. Two deer came to the water's edge to drink, but vanished before the boatmen could fire. High overhead flocks of pelicans soared in noiseless array with never a word of welcome to the world below; sometimes they appeared like a vaporous bank as their wings and breasts drifted into view; then as they turned and departed they seemed a dark cloud in the blue void, but, like the winds, they never tired, never touched foot

upon the earth nor paused in their airy wanderings. The pelican seems not to know that the earth is lying beneath; the wild geese and ducks as they pass over the Middle States are ever ready to be lured by some sequestered lake or stream, where they find both rest and food; but the pelican seems to find both rest and food in the expanse of heaven. It certainly does come to *terra firma*, but the hunter seldom knows the place where it alights or hears the whirr of its pinion as it bends its flight to earth.

The boys had looked forward to their first view of the Mississippi. They had always heard it spoken of as the largest river in the world, and had pictured it to themselves as a boundless stretch of water.

"Halloo! what has made the river so muddy?" exclaimed Martin one day about noon as he stepped from under the awning where he and Owen had taken refuge from the warm June sun.

"That's strange!" ejaculated Owen when he heard Martin's exclamation of wonder.

"The river is much broader, too," put in Martin.

"Yes, and swifter that it was."

"Great pos-sim-mons!" cried out the captain, who had been enjoying a good rest; "we've jus' got out on the Miss'ippi 'fore we knowed it."

"This ain't the Mississippi, Mr. Lane!" objected Owen with no small degree of astonishment.

"I reckon it is, my boy! the Ohio never gits that muddy."

"Why, I thought the Mississippi was the largest river in the world."

"That's what they say."

"And are you sure this is the Mississippi?" inquired Martin.

"That's what they've called it long 's I've been 'round here."

"I thought it would be so wide that you couldn't see the banks."

"It does widen out right smart down below," came the answer of the captain.

The two boys were disappointed indeed; after all their expectation, the great river was but little larger than the Ohio and had none of the latter's charms.

"I must lie down," said Owen, after gazing at the expanse of water for a few minutes. For the past three days he had been struggling to fight off a feeling of weakness and lassitude until at last he was forced to succumb.

"You mustn't forget that you are cook; it is time for you to get dinner ready," answered Martin in a playful way, although the boy realized that his companion was ill and was becoming weaker each hour.

"You will have to be both cook and doctor, Martin; I am feeling much worse than I did the evening we went to the house of Mr. Haywood. My head is aching, and my back,—you don't know how it is hurting me!"

"Are you chilly?" asked Martin, following Owen to the awning.

"Just a little; I felt the chills coming over me a few minutes ago."

"Well, I reckon they won't last long in such weather as this. I only hope that it won't get much warmer lower down the river."

Martin covered the sufferer and sat down by him, while Mose busied himself in preparing dinner. The boys noticed that the captain was standing in the rear of the Woodruff, scanning the river above most intently, whereupon Martin walked over to him and gazed in the same direction. Mr. Lane explained the reason of his action. A small boat had suddenly appeared far up the stream. Two men were in it, who as soon as they caught sight of the raft again pulled their craft toward the shore. Their action was enough to arouse the captain's suspicion and to keep him on the alert all that day.

About sunset the boat again appeared, closer this time; nor would the captain have noticed it unless he had been on the watch and unless he knew from experience where to look for a lurking foe. When the raft was towed ashore and Martin asked to hunt permission was refused. While Martin and the captain were quietly discussing Owen's condition they were startled by the report of a rifle, and at the same time a squirrel fell into the water quite close to the raft. Martin turned and saw a rifle drop from Owen's hand.

"Owen! are you hit!" exclaimed Martin rushing toward the boy, who was pale and trembling with excitement.

"Git your rifle an' lay down behind the corn-bin!" came the stern command of the captain.

"I'm not hurt," said Owen.

"Jus' what I've been 'specting," affirmed the captain, not hearing Owen's protest. "But I didn't know they was so close; lay low, boys, lay low!" Pistol in hand the captain poled the raft out into the water.

"What's the matter, Mr. Lane? That was my rifle you heard. I killed a squirrel; didn't you hear it fall into the water?" asked Owen.

It was some time before Owen could make his companions understand what had happened. Just as the Woodruff neared the shore Owen, who was lying on his back, saw a squirrel in a large gum tree overhead; near him hung a rifle in such a position that he could swing it around and discharge it without supporting its weight. This he did and by mere chance hit the mark.

"You are no longer sick if you can shoot that way," insisted the doctor when he had listened to the explanation.

"Don't laugh, Mart; I am sick. I don't see how I ever killed the squirrel."

"Here's the critter," said the captain, holding up the squirrel, which Bounce had brought to the edge of the raft. Still it was some time before he recovered from his surprise; nor did he approach the shore again until it was dark and he had towed the raft to the opposite side of the river; and he was very careful to have the Woodruff so moored that it could be poled out into the

stream at the least indication of danger during the night.

Martin set to work to prepare the squirrel for his patient. "After that shot ——"

"Not so loud, youngster, if you don't want to git a ball through your noggle," were the warning words of Mr. Lane. "I don't reckon they wants to kill; but there's no telling what they'll do, and it's best to be a little 'ticlar."

After this advice it is needless to say that the two boys were quiet for the rest of the night. "You will soon be well, Owen," said Martin in a whisper as he came closer and bent over the sick boy. "Your nerves are getting steady or you could never have made that shot."

"I told you, Mart, that it was an accident; I never in all my life felt so weak and nervous."

"As soon as I get this squirrel fried and make you a piece of toast you will be a new man."

"Please don't talk to me of eating. Get me a blanket, for I am chilly."

"Why, Owen!" exclaimed the doctor, "it is the warmest night we've had; you can't be cold a night like this."

"But I am cold, Mart, and I want more covering. I only wish I had stayed in that hut on the Ohio."

Martin was still convinced that a piece of the delicate squirrel would dispel his companion's ills; he therefore continued to prepare the savory dish.

"Great pos-sim-mons!" ejaculated the captain when he saw the boy preparing to strike a light from a flint;

"great pos-sim-mons! you 's 'termined to have us fellers shot 'fore day-time. That light 'll show the devils jus' where we is."

"But Owen must have something to eat, Mr. Lane!"

"He kin wait till morning, boy; no light here to-night!"

Martin put the squirrel aside and walking to Owen asked in a pathetic voice: "What can I do for you? You see he won't let me cook anything."

"I tell you, Mart, I can't eat; get me another blanket."

"I just gave you one."

"But it wasn't enough; I want another."

"I'll bring over the heap of flax and cover you with it!"

"Mart! please don't joke and laugh; bring the cover."

Martin now realized for the first time Owen's precarious condition. He had heard of severe and dangerous fevers which began with the chills. The boy who lay before him had every indication of such a fever: his hand was cold, his skin was shriveled, his teeth were chattering; from that moment Martin became a tender nurse. He had wished to be called "the doctor" when each of the crew took a name, and now it seemed that his title would not be an idle nor meaningless one.

Two hours passed. During this time the captain sat at the edge of the raft, rifle in hand, and Bounce on duty at his side; with these precautions it would be impossible for a party to surprise the voyagers. The doctor was close to the sufferer, ready to assist him as

best he could. Mose came and went, called the boy "honey" and "darling" and did all in his power to console him.

"I am warmer now; can't you take one of the quilts away?"

"Yes, but be careful, Owen; you mustn't expose yourself too much to the night air."

"I am warmer, but my headache is worse,—and my tongue, how dry it is! Can't you give me a little water, Mart?"

"I must put some slippery-elm in it first." Here at last the doctor could prescribe for his patient. Just what properties slippery-elm possessed he did not know, but of this much he was certain: no sick person in the Cooper household was allowed to take a drink unless a piece of the bark had been put in the water.

"Take off another of those quilts, for I am getting warmer and warmer," said Owen when Martin returned with the cup of water.

"Why do you move so often? Is the bed hard?"

"No, it isn't hard, but I can't keep quiet a minute. Martin, I believe I am dying."

"Nonsense! it is only a chills and fever you have; but they are not dangerous. Now take a drink; not much, though. Sick people should not drink much water. There, now; I reckon you feel better."

"No! no! Martin, I am sweating all over the body; just feel my forehead,—it is wet."

Martin knew not what to answer.

"I only wish that Father Badin was here," continued the boy in a voice which was scarcely audible. "It is hard to die away from home and without a priest. Get your beads, Martin, and let us say them together." Martin lay down close to the sufferer and the two said their beads in whispers.

"How is you, honey?" came the pathetic voice of Mose.

"Oh! I've got pains from head to foot," muttered the fever-stricken lad; "still, Father Badin says that we must all suffer some, and I shall try not to complain."

"Dat's right, honey. I'll jes' pray hard fur you."

"Thank you, Mose; and Mart, I am so glad that you came with us on the Woodruff. Of course I like Mr. Lane, but he doesn't know anything about religion, and he wouldn't know how to say the prayers with me if I were dying. Now if you see that I am dying, Martin, say the Act of Contrition and the Acts of Faith and Hope and Charity. And tell mother that I will see her in heaven, and father and sister, too, Martin; I will see them all in heaven." These words were spoken at intervals and with much exertion. Martin did not answer, for the tears were flowing fast and the power of speech seemed to have left him. Owen had never before been really sick, and now he was persuaded that death was near. He had been present at the death of an uncle and remembered how the sorrowing family gathered around the bed and prayed for the departed soul; and now he wished his friend and companion to pray for him.

The boys had entirely forgotten the warnings of danger; they forgot that an enemy was following them, perhaps with the intention to murder. The captain on his part did not disturb them as he sat and listened to their whispers, for so intent was he on his duty of watching that he did not realize Owen's real state.

As the night wore on the fever abated, and Owen fell into a gentle sleep which lasted until morning. Martin, too, slept. When the first rays of light were visible in the east the captain aroused Martin and Mose, poled the raft out into the current, and, after giving them strict injunctions to watch carefully and to awake him on the least indication of danger, himself sought a much needed rest.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BOB SHOCLIFF'S CABIN.

Five days the Woodruff drifted down the Mississippi, and for five days the mysterious craft which appeared near the Ohio followed. Mr. Lane gave the enemy no chance to make an attack except in open daylight, for he never moored the raft until after dark and permitted no fire or noise, so that it was all but impossible to find the place where the raft had stopped. The captain kept guard at night and slept the greater part of the day, when he was relieved by Noah and the doctor. Owen had improved but little; true, his attacks were not as severe as the one which he experienced on the first night, but he still suffered from both chills and fevers; his headaches were almost continual, he could eat but little, slept but little, and felt that his strength was fast failing him. He repeatedly asked the captain to stop for a day. Oh! if he could only walk upon the solid earth again; if he could leave the shaking, tossing raft, if he could rest for a few hours, he felt that he would regain his strength and appetite.

It was the afternoon of the seventh day; the boat of the enemy had not been seen for thirty-six hours,

but this worried the captain all the more for he did not know from what side to expect an attack. Perhaps it would be best to stop and see whether the boat was still following, and better still if the Woodruff could be concealed along the shore in the high grass so that the pursuers would pass by.

"We are going to land," said the doctor to his patient.

"That's fine!" came the quick response.

"Mr. Lane wants to give you a rest."

"I've been resting for a week; but it isn't the kind of rest I want. Oh! Mart, I shall be well after one day's stop. But where is Mr. Lane going to tie the raft?"

"Over there to the west; raise yourself up for a moment. Do you see the ridge? Well, there is a creek emptying into the river; we are going to pull into it."

In the meantime the captain had jumped into the skiff and was towing the raft with powerful strokes toward the mouth of the small stream. It was a delightful spot; the right bank of the creek rose to the height of fifteen feet, forming a pleasant contrast with the low, swampy country on the opposite side. The voyagers were surprised to see a small log house perched upon the hill, surrounded by a clearing of some half a dozen acres.

"Someone lives there," said Martin as the two boys looked out at the welcome landscape.

"You judge from the smoke which is coming from the chimney; but are you sure it is smoke,—yes, now I see. Hurrah for a good rest and a real bed to sleep

in!" Owen could scarcely restrain his desire to leap into the water and swim ashore, for the raft moved slowly along the narrow stream.

"Come on, Bounce, come on!" cried out Martin, jumping on the side of the raft as if he intended to dive into the water. The dog needed no second challenge; he sprang from the Woodruff and soon reached the shore, while Martin shouted with delight and Owen waved his cap in the air. But their hilarity was soon checked by the captain, whose stern voice commanded silence.

"Now for a race ——" Owen uttered the words, made a step or two, and at once sank down to the ground.

"Come on! come on!" boasted Martin, "I can beat you running."

"Wait, Mart! wait a moment!"

"Come, let us have a race!"

"I can't move from the spot!"

"You are only a little stiff; a run through the woods will do you good. I can beat to-day!"

"I can't even get up," sighed the sick boy.

"Why, you are weak," acknowledged Martin, returning to the place where Owen lay.

"As weak as a kitten."

"Git back in that boat, youngsters and keep as still as mice in a hole when the cat's around," said the captain, who shouldered his rifle and walked toward the cabin. He was stern and serious. In fact he had scarcely spoken since the day when the stranger boat made its

appearance near the mouth of the Ohio; for the past twelve hours his apprehensions of danger seemed to have increased.

Half way up the hill the captain was met by a settler,—a tall, gaunt, sun-burned individual, with close-cropped, sandy beard and dressed in tattered breeches, supported by one suspender of raw deer-skin. The two men gazed at each other for a few seconds, then dropped their rifles and grasped each other's hands. The man's name was Shocloff; he and Richard Lane had met in Kentucky on a farm near the Green River.

"I reckon you're jus' the man I'm looking for, Bob. Two men 's been following us for seven days and trying to rob us. We'll leave the youngsters and Mose with my raft and jus' go down and see if we kin find 'em."

"I ain't forgot how to shoot," replied the man, "an' when it comes to helpin' a Kintuc you kin count on Bob Shocloff."

"I'll tell you 'bout the fellers as we go along," said Mr. Lane.

The two friends walked back to the raft, where Bob Shocloff welcomed the boys and expressed his joy at meeting people from "ole Kintuc." He then bade the boys go up to his hut and remain there until he and Mr. Lane should return. Rifle in hand the men walked down the creek toward the river, while Owen and Martin prepared to take up their quarters in their new home, Noah was left to watch the ark, and protested that he would protect it against any attack.

"Slowly now, Mart, slowly; I really didn't know that I was so weak."

"Don't be afraid, you will be able to run that race in a few days. I am glad we met a friend; he may keep us here for some time."

"I'll ask the captain to stay until I get strong again. But wait until I take a short rest."

"Did you ever see the captain look so cross?" asked Martin as the two boys seated themselves beneath the thick clusters of a cypress.

"No; and he is scared. I would have been frightened, too, but I was so sick that I forgot everything else."

"Then," put in Martin, "he has n't told us who are following us."

"Perhaps he does n't know."

"Well, he might at least tell us what he thinks about the matter."

"The poor man has n't had a night's rest for a week."

"And he has forgotten all about his speech and arithmetic," added the other.

"I am feeling better now," said Owen after a short rest. "It's good the captain brought the Woodruff into this quiet branch; shall we start for the house again?"

"It would be hard to find a better place to rest than this root. I never saw such big ones."

"You can scarcely call them roots," argued Owen.

"And you can't call them branches," contended the doctor, as he reclined in the comfortable seat which nature had provided for him.

"And they are certainly not trunks," affirmed the cook.

The boys were in a strange land. If there was one thing with which they were acquainted it was the trees and shrubs and flowers of their native state; now all was new to them; for the first time in their lives had they rested beneath the shade of a cypress tree. The immense, glabrous protuberances which rose from the roots to the height of two or three feet, forming natural and comfortable couches, were unlike any growth which they had witnessed in the forests of Kentucky; but the tree did not please them,—it was out of proportion, the small, flat leaves did not seem to harmonize with the huge, cone-shaped trunk, nor with the rich and varied growth of this sub-tropic climate. Nature seemed to be aware of this defect and had hung the naked boughs with tapestries of moss and entwined the bare branches with monstrous vines. The boys looked in vain for trees familiar to them: there were oaks, but they were dwarfed and gnarled, and contrasted most unfavorably with the sturdy giants which reared their heads above the blue knobs which skirted the Beech Fork; there were water beeches bending over the creek, but they were puny and sickly; one walnut tree stood before them, but it could not thrive, for its larger companions shut out from it the bright sunbeams which were indispensable for its perfect development.

The woods and the sky — how dreamy they seemed! The sun was sinking in a purple mist, the air was hazy,

the creek was lulled to rest. Not a voice, not a sound was heard. The trees were sleeping, the earth and sky were sleeping, all nature was in a dream.

The boys had reached the cabin on the hill and were about to enter, when they saw a man rushing across the clearing toward them.

"See! who is that?" asked Martin.

"It does n't look like the man who went down the creek with Mr. Lane," replied Owen.

Another man appeared at the edge of the woods beyond the clearing, firing twice with his revolver at the first one, whom he was evidently pursuing. Before the boys could enter the house and bar the door it was pushed open, and to their surprise they stood face to face with Mr. Haywood.

Noah in the meanwhile had abandoned the ark and crept away to hide in the tall grass and underbrush near the creek.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ATTACK.

THE small stream into which the Woodruff had been towed was known as the Bayou Tabac, and was not more than three times the width of the raft and about half a mile in length. A hundred yards north of the bayou stood the cabin, having a single door facing the water and two windows without glass opening to the east and west. The clearing east of the house, that is, between the house and the Mississippi, was not a hundred feet wide; to the west was a field of no small dimensions, extending to the water's edge. It was across this field that Mr. Haywood had been pursued.

"Get your rifles!" exclaimed he, as he rushed into the house and fastened the door.

"We left them on the raft," replied Martin.

"There is one in the corner; see whether it is loaded."

"Yes, sir, it is," answered the boy as he picked up the long deer-rifle.

"Stand by the window, and don't let the man in." His command was answered by the discharge of two pistols, a ball from one of which entered the east window and struck the wall over Owen's head.

Two other men now appeared on that side of the house running down the incline toward the raft. One was Coil Sanders and the other, from his limp, could be recognized as Antoine Guibeau. Mose could hear them breathe, so close did they pass by the clump of grass in which he was concealed; forgetting his promise to stick by the raft, he crawled farther into the grass and ensconced himself behind a gnarled cypress tree.

Leaping into the canoe, Coil began to tow the raft down the bayou, while Guibeau boarded it and assisted him with a long poling-stake. Martin opened the door and fired the rifle to frighten the men and at the same time to give warning to Mr. Lane; the robbers fired two volleys in return, and then worked the pole and oars with renewed energy.

While Martin was reloading his rifle, Cyrus Appleway, for it was he who had pursued Mr. Haywood, ran from the woods across the field to the west of the cabin and, entering a small canoe, pulled for the raft. As the boy rammed the ball into the rifle he grew nervous — for the first time in his life his target was to be a human being.

“Kill the man in the first skiff!” cried Haywood, for he was afraid to attempt the shot, having had but little experience with a rifle. The lad ran some distance down the hill, paused, and shouted: “Stop! Stop, there, or I’ll shoot you!”

The man rowed on.

“Stop!” Threats were useless. Martin raised his rifle

and sent a ball clean through Coil Sanders' right arm.

In the meanwhile the captain and Shocloff, who were walking up the river to reconnoiter, heard the shots near the cabin and hurriedly retraced their steps. As they approached the raft they heard the second shot from Martin's rifle. Rushing through the tall grass, the captain leveled his rifle at Antoine, who, with a cry of "Don't shoot!" dropped the pole and threw both hands into the air.

"Dar's one ob 'em gibbed in," ejaculated Mose, who was peering from behind the cypress.

Just then Haywood ran down toward the captain to call attention to the fact that a third man, Cyrus Appleway, was behind the raft and escaping to the opposite side of the bayou. Not recognizing him, and thinking that he was one of the robbers, Shocloff covered him with his rifle. Up went his hands at once.

"Dar's an-udder gibbin' in," exclaimed Mose. "Jes' a-gittin' 'em like catfish in muddy water."

Appleway reached the shore, fired two shots from his pistol, and disappeared in the woods. A ball from his pistol struck Shocloff, who uttered a groan and fell to the ground at the side of the captain.

Haywood was at his side in an instant, and on examining the wound found that it was not dangerous. "I'll take care of the two wounded men," said he to the captain. "You go up the river about half a mile, where we left our boats, and cut off Appleway. Martin can see that the Frenchman does not escape."

Richard Lane stared at Haywood, and was about to

ask how he had been so suddenly transformed into a friend, but he saw from the supposed deserter's actions that he could be trusted. As no time was to be lost, the old marksman, after getting the proper directions, swung his rifle over his shoulder and started up the river.

"It's now my time to do the ordering: step out here, and let us bind your hands," demanded Haywood of Guibeau.

The Frenchman obeyed, but hissed the words: "You traitor!"

"You forced me into your robber band, but you hadn't the brains to keep me there!" retorted the captor.

"You are a coward!" affirmed Guibeau.

"Strange words from one who surrendered without a fight," was the reply.

"I've been in more fights than you ever read of!" boasted the prisoner.

"I wish you had been killed in the first one," spoke up Sanders, who came ashore holding his shattered right arm with his left hand.

Each accused the other of cowardice, while Haywood bound the wounds and Martin stood guard with his rifle.

The captain returned after half an hour and reported that Appleway had reached the canoe before him and escaped. Mose in the meanwhile had crept away to the cabin to give Owen an account of the shooting as it appeared from the cypress.

"I have just come to tell you why the trapper did not return to the cabin on the Ohio, and how he came to

be in the company of the robbers," said Martin, who, on being relieved by the captain, entered the hut and walked to the straw couch on which Owen was resting.

"But what have you done with the wounded man?" asked the boy.

"He is with the captain and Mr. Shocloff; they are not dangerously hurt. But, Owen, it wasn't Mr. Haywood's fault that he did not come back that night. When he got to the tavern in Botland it was midnight. Well, he saw three men sitting on a bench and heard them say something about robbing; then he went inside the cabin near a window and learned from what was said that the men intended to rob the Woodruff."

"Then why didn't he come and tell us?"

"I reckon they were too sharp for him. Appleway saw him and wouldn't let him leave the place. The next day they put him in a small room and watched him and sent Guibeau to tell us that he had changed his mind about going south with us. They followed us in two boats, Appleway keeping the trapper with him all the time, but when they landed to attack us Mr. Haywood managed to escape and ran to tell us. You know the rest; Appleway followed him and shot at him just as we entered the cabin."

"I'm glad that he is still our friend," replied Owen.

As they were conversing the trapper entered the cabin; he was in great distress over the loss of his wig, which flew off while Appleway was pursuing him.

The captain and Shocloff were engaged in earnest con-

versation without, but they spoke so loud that the boys could catch the drift of the talk. Should they follow the robber? and in case they decided to do so, would it not be better to start early in the morning to overtake him before he reached the small town called Bellevue? In his wounded condition Shocloff could render but little service, but he was familiar with the river, and could point out the bayous where the man would in all probability seek protection. But the settler had other reasons for wishing to join the crew of the Woodruff, for he thought it prudent to go where he could have his wound and that of Sanders properly dressed. Besides, he had a crop of tobacco which he had long wished to carry to market in New Orleans. This tobacco was his principal source of income. His small farm was south of the tobacco belt, but being on a hill the dry land was well suited to the cultivation of what was called the Buma brand of tobacco; and it was all the more popular at New Orleans, as it was sold as a Southern product. It would take only half an hour to load the extra cargo, and the raft could start at sunrise.

There was one difficulty — would Owen be able to stand the voyage, or would it be necessary to give him a longer rest? The captain felt in duty bound to consult the boys this time before deciding on any course of action, but since Owen had fallen asleep Martin's opinion was asked. The boy was surprised when he heard of the captain's plans. Owen, he pleaded, had for days suffered more than Mr. Lane was aware of; he was weak

to exhaustion; he had been forced to rest three times in walking from the raft to the house that afternoon; it was simply out of the question, for the boy was in no condition to begin the voyage. The captain was silent when he heard the answer; even at the risk of his raft and cargo he was determined to see to the interest of the sick boy.

Shocloff came to the rescue by suggesting that the two boys stay at his cabin and he take their place on the raft. The captain did not answer this proposition, as he knew how keenly they had felt the slight when they were left on the banks of the Ohio. Martin listened for some time to the settler's suggestion and then went to consult with Owen.

CHAPTER XX.

FRIENDS PART COMPANY.

WHEN will you be ready to start?" asked Martin of Owen, for the latter had just awakened from a refreshing sleep.

"Don't mention anything about starting, Mart."

"Why I thought you would be entirely well after such a good sleep."

"I am much better; I dreamed that I was home."

"I knew that you would improve immediately; I am sure that you will be quite yourself again after a whole night's rest."

"I hope so."

"Then I can tell the captain to start early to-morrow."

"No, Mart; no!"

"Well the day after?"

"No."

"After two days?"

"No, Mart; please don't talk of starting."

"We can't stay here all summer."

"We shall have to stay a week or more."

"Even that will be impossible," objected Martin.

"Then you and Mr. Lane can go; I'll stay here with Mr. Shocloff."

"But he wants to come with us and take some tobacco to New Orleans."

"Then he can wait until we are ready," asserted the sick boy.

"But they want to start to-morrow; you see, Owen, they want to catch Mr. Appleway."

"It makes me sick to think of the old raft, Mart; really it does. I believe I would die in a single day if I went out on that hot river again."

"What is to be done?" inquired Martin; "we can't keep the captain here for two or three weeks; you know he has to get back for the election in November."

"Martin," said the sick boy after a short pause, "let us stay here."

"And not go with Mr. Lane to New Orleans?"

"Mr. Shocloff can take our place, Mart; I am tired of the voyage, and I don't care about seeing New Orleans. I only wanted to see the place where the Kentucky soldiers fought last January."

"I am willing to stay with you," was the answer.

"I wonder whether there is a priest around?" asked Owen.

"I'll find out from the settler."

"If there is, I'll be willing to stay; for we can go to Mass on Sundays when I am well, and if I get very sick again you can bring the priest here."

Martin went out into the yard to ask Mr. Shocloff if

there was a Catholic church in the neighborhood. The man informed him that there was a Catholic settlement called Bellevue thirty miles down the river, and a French priest called Father Boulet, or, as he styled him, Father Bullet. He promised, too, to leave with the boys his light Indian canoe; in this craft they would find no difficulty in going to Bellevue every Sunday. Martin went at once to convey the good intelligence to Owen.

Owen was delighted to hear about the French priest. Only thirty miles away! Why, that was only a pleasant row. The boy was perfectly contented now. In his sickness his Catholic instinct made him sigh for a priest. He felt that he was safe now, for in case of another attack Martin could go for Father Boulet. Then, too, the voyage had lost its charm; he had sailed down the Ohio to its mouth; down the Mississippi for more than three hundred miles. He did not care to go farther — as he said to Martin, it made him dizzy to think of embarking again on the Woodruff.

“How long will Mr. Lane be gone?” he asked of Martin when the arrangements about the priest had been made.

“He will get back here about the middle of August.”

“Will that give us time to reach Kentucky before the election?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, Martin, I am so glad that we are going to stay here; I must hurry and get well so that we can visit Father Boulet.”

"I wonder if he is like Bishop Flaget; the Bishop is French, you know."

"He will certainly let us stay with him a few days. I'll tell him that Father Byrne and Father Badin stay with us, then he'll be sure to let us stay with him."

"We'll fix all that when they leave us," replied Martin. "Try to go to sleep now, so that you can be well enough to walk down to the creek and see them start tomorrow."

"Of course, Bounce will stay with us," insisted Owen.

"I reckon he won't go unless you do."

"Then you will get my rifle."

"Yes."

"And my pistol; the one I got as a prize at the shooting-match."

"Yes, I'll see to that, too."

"And the powder,—and fishing lines,—and everything else we need for the two months we are here."

"Yes, yes; I'll see to everything. Go to sleep now, go to sleep."

When asked his opinion about leaving the two boys alone, Mr. Haywood assured the captain that there was no danger of a relapse and that the fever had entirely vanished.

"The boy needs some days or even weeks to regain his strength," he said. "He has passed through the crisis nicely, and before you reach New Orleans he will be himself again."

"I'll take your advice in the matter. I reckon the youngsters kin look out for themselves."

As early as three o'clock on the following morning Mr. Lane, with the assistance of the trapper and Mose, carried the tobacco aboard. Bob Shoccliff superintended the work, nor could he withhold his admiration as Richard Lane strode past him carrying a burden which few men could lift.

The sun was now up, breakfast was over, and the party walked slowly toward the bayou where the raft was moored. Owen and Martin were silent; now at last they were to be separated from the Woodruff and from the company of Mr. Lane. True, it was their own choosing; they had expressed not only their willingness but their desire to be left at the home of the settler; far from inducing them to stay, the captain was willing to wait for Owen even if the whole summer were spent there. Mr. Lane had easily been persuaded to leave them on the banks of the Ohio, for they could return home as soon as Owen had regained his strength; but to leave them all alone in a strange state and in a place where everything was new to them was a more serious matter. If any evil should befall them his would be the responsibility. He had assured their parents that there was not the least danger in the voyage and had promised to bring the boys back to Kentucky early in September; there would be considerable anxiety if he did not reach the Beech Fork at the time appointed. On the other hand, the captain knew that the boys could provide for themselves; they were at home in the forest and along the stream. There seemed to be less risk in leaving them

"We'll settle that after I take my rest. It is a fine thing to be on a raft for several days, Mart."

"Why?"

"Because one feels so fine when he steps on the solid earth again; but now for that rest. You and Bounce must not make any noise until I awake."

"You can trust us. I am going in the house to see what Mr. Shocloff left behind, for he told us that we could have everything we found. Go to sleep, now; go to sleep."

Owen did not sleep; he lay upon his velvety couch and gazed at the rich, woodland scene above and around him. Although the sun was up, nature seemed not to have fully awakened. The air was fragrant with the breath of the magnolias which grew along the margin of the bayou; the eastern sky was all aglow with burning clouds of poppy-red; the mists which floated over the treetops were edged with bands of delicate cherry. The woods were painted with every shade of virescent hue — the apple green scarcely distinguishable from yellow, the viridian, the deeper dyes of myrtle and olive — all were there; so varied, so blended, so interwoven that no pen could describe and no brush could depict their manifold gradations. Here the tropic and temperate zones embraced each other, and each lent its own peculiar charm to the scene; the air had all the pureness and freshness of the Central States and the sky all the shimmering glory of the South. But the magnolias! Ah, the magnolias! With their drooping, evergreen leaves,

their graceful, abovate petals, their spotless, odorous flowers of purest white, scattered with royal magnificence and prodigality through the forest and lighting it up with the glory of paradise, there they grew and clustered in all their primeval beauty and grandeur. Owen gazed out on the scene, drank in its peaceful loveliness, inhaled the perfumed, soporiferous air, and fell into a gentle sleep.

Within the house near-by the scene was anything but inviting or poetic. Martin determined to give the place a thorough spring cleaning. Every article of furniture, if furniture it could be called, was removed, and the place was swept and dusted. Before beginning operations, however, the boy was obliged to make both broom and duster; to do this he found excellent material, for the small reeds along the bayou or the creek, as he and Owen called it, when stripped of their leaves and tied in bunches were good brooms, while the natural reeds with their leaves on were found to be capital dusters. Had Bob Shocloff returned that day for dinner he would not have recognized the house as the cabin in which he had lived for fifteen years. With the quilts and coverlets brought from the Woodruff, Martin made two beds; then hung their rifles and extra clothing along the wall, washed and scoured the cooking utensils, placed a small crucifix over the fireplace, as was customary in all the Catholic families in Kentucky, and finally sat down on the door-step to take his mid-day meal.

About an hour later Owen awoke and saw his com-

panion walking up from the bayou, dripping wet. "Hal-loo! what has happened?" he inquired.

"Why didn't you sleep until I had time to change my clothes?" replied the boy playfully.

"What has happened to you?" repeated the first speaker.

"I told you about a skiff which Mr. Shocloff left for us?"

"Yes, I remember you said something about a skiff last night."

"An Indian canoe?"

"Yes."

"And he took our boat with him?"

"Yes; but what about the Indian canoe?"

"I reckon everything is the matter with it."

"So you've been trying it; is it hard to row?"

"Well I reckon I did, and over it went. I tried again, — if I fell out of that canoe once I went over twenty times. It doesn't give you any warning — just over, and that's all about it."

"Well, did you learn how to row it?"

"Not much, but I'm going to try again this evening."

Owen followed Martin into the house and enjoyed the soft bed and the rye-coffee and toast which had been prepared for him. Then he rested again while Martin went to make a second attempt at learning how to use the canoe. This time the boy was more successful; in fact he balanced himself and guided the craft from the very start. Up and down the bayou he paddled

as lightly as a duck. How pleasant to skim the water in the light vessel! How rapidly he could turn in the narrow stream! Not for a moment now would he think of exchanging the canoe for his own clumsy boat. The boy grew bold and drove his canoe out into the current of the Mississippi; but here, too, he could ride and veer at will. So much did he enjoy the sport that he did not notice that it was growing quite late; he pulled ashore, ran to the cabin into which he rushed with a shout of triumph: "Hurrah! hurrah!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, Mart," came the feeble answer, "the fever is back again."

"Owen, Owen, poor boy! I should not have stayed so long."

"You could not help me, Mart; but get me more cover."

"Are you as sick as when on the raft?"

"Yes; I am feeling much worse than I did then."

"And can I get you anything to eat or drink?"

"No."

The sick boy passed through the same sufferings as he had experienced on board the Woodruff, but this second attack was far more severe than the first had been. The chills were followed by a burning fever and sickening headache; then came the sweating period, during which the head was moist and beads of perspiration appeared on the brow and face; then the whole body freely sweated, much to the relief of the sufferer. After this the temperature began to decline and the

pain was at an end. During these long hours of suffering from heat and cold Martin did not leave Owen's side.

"You must go down the river to-morrow, Mart, and get Father Boulet," muttered the boy.

"Do you think I shall die to-night?" he asked several times when the pain was most acute. "Now pray with me, Martin, pray with me that I may not complain, but may bear it patiently; but, oh, Martin, I am so thirsty! I am so thirsty! Can't you give me a drop of water, only a drop?"

"No! Owen; I gave you some on the raft and it made you worse. You remember what Father Badin told us once in catechism class."

"About suffering with our Lord?"

"Yes; he said that God often sent suffering to those He loved the most."

"Then, Martin, He must love me to-night, for, oh! I am suffering. Give me patience, sweet Jesus, give me patience. And Martin, if I die, will you take me to the Catholic church where Father Boulet is, and ask him to say a Mass for me? Father Badin said that we should have a Mass said for those we love and who were dear to us on earth."

The boys spoke in whispers. Throughout the long night of suffering hand was clasped in hand; and even when the agony was at an end and the sufferer slept, the faithful companion did not leave his side, but sought his short repose with his head resting upon the same pillow, hand still clasped in hand.

The following day at almost the same hour the attack was repeated, and on the third day the dreaded chills and fever again seized the boy. The nights were more painful than those which had preceded. Owen, too, was fast growing weaker. Something must be done! Yet, how could Martin leave the bedside to seek help, to go for Father Boulet? He must be with the sick boy at night; and yet, he could not go to Bellevue and return that same day. He blamed himself and the captain for abandoning Owen in his weak condition.

Again and again the enfeebled lad asked him when Father Boulet was coming. Mr. Shocloff, too, had said that if the fever returned the most dangerous period was the sixth day; something must be done before that time.

It was just after midnight. The fever had left Owen and he was sleeping. Martin left the bedside, walked out into the cool night air, gazed up at the heavens where the bright, full moon was in the zenith; then he retraced his steps into the cabin, looked at the sleeper for a moment and again was gone.

There was a splash of a single oar in the bayou, and a few minutes later an Indian canoe glided out into the Mississippi with its prow turned toward the south.

CHAPTER XXII.

OFF FOR BELLEVUE.

THE light canoe swept noiselessly on. It was easy to avoid the snags and banks in the bright moonlight. Occasionally a huge cotton tree reared its head above the forest growth and appeared like a phantom of evil. The whoop of a crane was heard from a neighboring marsh. On sped the light craft, propelled by current and oar. The cooling night air fanned the boy's face, and although he rowed with more than wonted energy he did not feel the exertion. There was but one thought before his mind—to bring Father Boulet to the sufferer's bedside before the dreaded attack should return. Would this be possible? Would it be possible to row up the river for thirty miles ere the sun had more than half sunk. It was delightful sailing now in the cool night air, the current driving on the craft; but it would be all the more difficult to return against this same current.

When morning came more than half the way was passed; and when Martin Cooper paused to read the shadow on the sun dial near the little church in the French village of Bellevue it was not yet eight o'clock.

Close by stood a neat, whitewashed cottage. This, thought the boy, must be the home of the priest. He knocked, but no answer came. He tried again to make his presence known, then walked around the house and entered the little church. Here he prayed, oh, so fervently. The little light before him told him that his Lord was there. He could bring assistance to the poor sufferer now so many miles away; miles away from home, from friends, with no one near to comfort or console. As Martin prayed, prayed for poor, sick Owen, he felt that his prayer was heard, that in some way God would send the needed help.

"Where is the priest?" asked he of a little urchin who was playing in the dusty road which led from the church to the village.

The boy shook his head, jumped to his feet and scampered off toward a cottage at no great distance.

"Can you tell me where Father Boulet is?" Martin inquired of a rather corpulent, dark-complexioned woman, who, dressed in the gaudiest of yellow, appeared at the door of the cottage.

With the handle of a home-made broom the landlady pointed farther down the dusty road to a group of half a dozen houses. Martin repeated his question; the landlady muttered some few unintelligible French words, brandished her broom and disappeared within the door.

"Can anyone here tell me where I can find the priest of the village, Father Boulet?" Surely he could get the information here. Martin was now standing before

the only store of the settlement. In front of it were half a dozen loungers dressed in gaudy Canadian costume—trousers of brightest yellow, stockings of blue, shirts with ruffled fronts, and long feathers protruding from the slouch hats.

They understood the word, Boulet, and knew at once that the stranger was seeking for the priest. Then followed an animated conversation accompanied with gesticulations towards the four points of the compass. Several times a contestant turned to the boy and pleaded with him to believe his statement and not to listen to the opinions of the others. It was all a Babel of confusion to the astonished visitor, who was unaccustomed to such vehement discussions. Martin's attention was drawn in an especial way to one individual, a mere pigmy in size, but more than a match for all the rest when it came to talking; and as for gesticulation, he not only employed his hands but his feet and head. As Martin afterwards expressed it to Owen, he rattled away liek a red-headed woodpecker on a dead tree.

A tall, heavy-set, loose-jointed settler, clad in the home-spun jeans of the Western trapper, now appeared upon the scene; he was a true specimen of manhood, almost as large as Mr. Lane. To him the others appealed in confirmation of their views. After listening for some moments he walked over to Martin and said: "You are looking for good Father Boulet; well, this much is certain, he left the village early in the morning. He seems to have gone everywhere,— north, east, south, and

west. I just got back; been down in pursuit of robbers. I'm sheriff of the county and marshal of Bellevue." There was something refined in the man's way of talking; it was evident that he had some education and had seen better days.

Martin's heart sank within him as he listened to the man's statement that the priest was gone.

And now the boy felt that he had not a moment to lose, he must hasten back to Owen. He explained to the marshal the object of his visit and besought him to urge the priest to come at once to the sick boy.

Martin's heart was sad. Father Boulet was often absent for weeks. Perhaps Owen would die without the consolation of having a priest with him; perhaps he would die before Martin could reach him. The marshal begged him to stay at the village and rest before beginning his long voyage. Martin accompanied him to his home and partook of some refreshments, when he went to the little church again and knelt before the tabernacle. He found great comfort there, and longed to lengthen his time of prayer; but he felt that duty called — so to the river bank he went.

In the meanwhile the news had spread through the village that Father Boulet was wanted for a sick call; that thirty miles away in the home of Bob Shocloff a boy was dying. Some were moved by sympathy, some by curiosity, to come to the bank where the boy had moored his boat. Two experienced oarsmen had come with the intention of accompanying Martin a part of the

voyage; but when they saw the light, Indian canoe they concluded that their help would be a hindrance, for the "Duck" with a single oarsman could make faster speed than half a dozen men in a clumsy pirogue. Martin now learned for the first time that his canoe was called the "Duck," and that its master was a frequent visitor at the Bellevue settlement. After receiving directions about avoiding the swift current of the river the boy entered the skiff, plied his oar, and was soon lost to view.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW A PRAYER WAS HEARD.

MARTIN! Martin," muttered Owen; and receiving no answer, called again. Bounce, who was sleeping on the floor close to the sick boy's bed, opened his eyes, then got up and walked toward the sufferer.

"Where is Martin?" asked the young master. "He has not been here this morning; can you tell me where he is?"

Bounce lifted his right foot and placed it in the hand of Owen as if to say that one friend at least was there. Owen found comfort in the company of the affectionate animal and caressed him and spoke to him as if he were the dearest of friends.

"Hand me that piece of bark," said he to Bounce, for on the floor he had observed something written on the inner side of the dry material. No doubt it had fallen from the bed. "There, that's right. You can understand, if you can't talk."

"To Fr. Boulet," was written in rough characters on the bark.

It would be impossible to describe what a thrill of

joy the sick boy experienced at that moment. Those who have never studied the character of a genuine Catholic boy are not willing to admit that he can blend a pure, simple, childlike love and devotion with all the love of sport and play that is found in other boys,—that he can run and play and scuffle during the time of recreation and when it has passed can kneel, and does kneel, before God with all the pure love of his young heart going out in prayer; that he can join with boyish gaiety a sober responsibility for his actions as a Christian. Owen Howard was a boy not of the sentimental kind; nor did he talk religion all day long to others. The unobservant would have noticed little in him that marked him as different from other boys; true they would have noticed that no word the least offensive ever escaped his mouth, that he was kind and ready to do a favor, that the blush of shame suffused his cheeks when aught was mentioned against the holy virtue. Still he was a boy well instructed in his holy religion. He knew that death was a solemn moment and had its stern and binding duties. Death now seemed close to him, and he must prepare for it—prepare for it in a Christian way by banishing from his mind all thought of earth and turning his thoughts to God. But, oh, the consolation to have a priest with him—to have Father Boulet at his side!

It was now past midday. Owen felt the dreaded attack slowly but surely creeping upon him. It would be impossible for Martin and the priest to come until

the following day; the thought of spending the night alone was truly appalling! Such a night of suffering was terrible, indeed, even with someone to whisper words of comfort; but to be alone, to be alone now, when he was reduced to such a state of weakness and helplessness,—this, oh, this was sufficient to crush the strongest heart.

And now the chill was upon him and he seemed to swoon away. Was that the paw of Bounce which touched his hand? And now did someone feel his chilled brow? Did someone speak to him? Was that Martin's voice? He opened his eyes and saw before him a venerable face the likeness of which time could never efface from his memory,—it was Père Boulet.

Near Bellevue the priest had met the Woodruff and learned from Captain Lane that the two boys had been left behind in the cabin of Bob Shocloff on the bank of the "Bayou Tabac." Mr. Lane told the priest how the sick boy had asked to see a priest; told him of the Howards, and of good Father Badin, who came there for services in a little chapel on the banks of the Beech Fork. Father Boulet and Father Badin were the best of friends; they had come to America together, had studied in Baltimore together, and though far apart had occasionally exchanged letters. Father Boulet's flock was scattered far and wide; still, when there was question of a sick call, he started at once, often traveling a distance of a hundred miles. But there was a special reason now for arriving at "Bayou Tabac" as soon as possible,

for the priest understood from Mr. Lane's description that Owen was suffering from intermittent fever; he knew that it was not dangerous if checked in the early stages of its growth, but often proved fatal if not properly treated or not attended to until it had exhausted the strength of its victim. The priest was led to believe, too, that Owen's attack would return. Returning home that night Father Boulet prepared a mixture of Indian root and dry calamus for the fever-stricken youth. On the following morning he said an early Mass, and shortly afterward entered his pirogue and turned its prow up the river. As he kept close to the shore, and Martin's canoe was out in the current, they passed each other unobserved.

The priest carried with him the Blessed Sacrament. All the beauties of that rich scene along the river seemed not to attract him, or, if he did turn his eyes at times to drink in the glories which the Creator had scattered so profusely, he at once bowed his head in lowly adoration and praise to this same Creator and God of All, whom he carried so close to his heart.

"Poor boy; poor boy," muttered the priest in soft, sweet accents. "God has sent me to you! God has sent me to you."

"Martin was so good to go for you; where is he?"

"I do not understand. Martin? who is he?"

"The boy who went for you."

"I do not know. I did not see him; the big man,—the giant,—he, he told me."

"Oh, Father, he left for you this morning."

"I do not know. But you must not talk. I have the Blessed Eucharist. There is no danger now; but you will suffer much. Offer it up, my little boy, in honor of the Passion of Our Good Lord, and to-morrow when the fever leaves you I shall hear your Confession and you can receive Holy Communion."

Father Boulet had treated many cases of fever, so that he understood Owen's condition perfectly. He knew that it was impossible to check an attack which had already begun; but as soon as the fever had subsided it would be necessary to apply remedies at once to prevent its return; or, if this could not be done, at least to render the second attack less violent.

It was past three in the morning when Martin stepped from the canoe and dragged his weary body up the hill from the Bayou. He knew nothing of Father Boulet's arrival; his mind was filled with evil forebodings. Perhaps he would find Owen dead. Had he acted wisely in leaving him alone? He scarcely dared to raise his eyes as he came close to the open door. He lifted them to behold what seemed a vision: Clad in sacred vestments Father Boulet stood close to Owen, offering up the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Martin fell upon his knees and poured forth a prayer of thanksgiving. Then he served the Mass, for Father Badin had taught him and Owen how to assist the priest during the Holy Sacrifice. The magnolias' fragrance was wafted in on the morning breeze and without

the voice of the bob-o-link was mingled with the song of the mocking-bird.

"Can I not go to Holy Communion?" asked Martin, rising and whispering into the ear of the priest.

Father Boulet bowed assent. It was just at the Offertory; from a box at the end of the table, being used as an altar, the priest took a particle and placed it on the paten.

Of Owen's Communion during Mass, and of Martin's when Mass was finished and he had gone to Confession, we need not tell.

When thanksgiving was finished the priest told the two boys to rest. His heart was drawn to them with more than human love. He saw in them two chosen souls; they had grown up in the forests of the Western World as pure as the untainted petals of virgin flowers. He had brought with him the Holy Eucharist as a Viaticum in case the sick boy should require it; but now he was glad that he had also brought what was necessary for the Mass, not only for his own consolation, but also because he found there those who so sighed for its consolations and its blessings.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BAYOU TABAC.

OWEN Howard and Martin Cooper were the happiest of lads. Three weeks had passed since Father Boulet's visit to Bayou Tabac, and medicine prescribed by the priest had gradually diminished the severity of the intermittent fever, until at the end of a week it entirely ceased. At first he was allowed no solid food, but only a little toddy and regular doses of the bitter Indian root mixed with calamus. For the past few days, however, he had enjoyed tender frog legs and turtle-soup, his strength was fast returning, and an appetite which Martin found it necessary to hold in check.

"How many frog legs are you going to eat?" asked he one day.

"Just as many as you will cook for me."

"If this keeps up much longer there won't be a frog in this part of the country."

"Then I can live on turtle soup and catfish."

"Shall I make you some turtle soup to-day?"

"I reckon I can take a little."

"The way your appetite is returning would frighten

even Aunt Margaret, with her kitchen full of provisions."

"Next week I hope to be able to take my place as cook; you certainly have done your duty as doctor. Did you know what you were bargaining for when you wished to be called the doctor?"

"No; it was bad enough to have Bounce sick—I didn't expect to have two patients on my hands."

"I never knew before what it was to be sick. I am wiser now, and have been taught one lesson?"

"What is that?"

"To be kind and patient with those who are suffering. But bring me another frog leg."

"Great pos-sim-mons!" exclaimed the cook, making use of the captain's favorite expression of surprise.

Father Boulet had left for Owen very minute directions which he was to follow during his period of convalescence. He was to stay within the clearing on the high ground and never for any reason visit the marshes; to remain within the house after sunset; to take but little exercise, and that of such a kind which would not fatigue him. During the cool of the early morning he could go to the bayou or river for a short row or to fish, but should return before it was warm.

With all these restrictions the boys were enabled to enjoy themselves and at the same time keep their table provided with a plentiful supply of game and fish. Nothing afforded them more pleasure than the hunting of young swamp hares, whose meat they found very delicate and savory. Then, too, the sport could be engaged

in without the least infringement of Father Boulet's rules.

"Now, Bounce, get to work and show these swamp rabbits that they can't fool you," said Owen one morning as he accompanied Martin on his first hunt after leaving his bed of sickness.

"He can start them, but he can't follow them," rejoined Martin, who had been watching the dog's vain efforts for two weeks.

"Those rabbits are not sharper than the ones in Kentucky," argued Owen.

"That may be; perhaps the scent is not as good. Still he finds it harder to keep the trail."

"And are there many of them?" asked Owen.

"Thick as blackberries; Bounce will have one started in less than five minutes: It is much prettier than the rabbit in Kentucky, with long, yellow teeth and smooth hair; but the hair is not very long. There are bright reddish lines around the eyes,—there, I told you so; he has one started already."

"How happy it makes me feel to listen to the old fellow barking! Why, it makes one think of our hunts along the Beech Fork."

The two boys were sitting beneath a large cotton tree at the end of the clearing, rifle in hand, ready for the swamp hare. "What is that?" asked Owen, whose quick eye spied a small, rusty, reddish-brown object creeping along about twenty feet away.

But before Martin could see the animal the whirr of

out in the Mississippi with Bounce for a long row; he would enjoy the sight for a while and then try to bring down one of the young deer for the table. It was useless to kill the older ones, as they were not wholesome eating during the summer months. The young were of a light, fulvous color, and the old deer of a dusky, reddish hue. The boy understood fully why he had not been seen; for he knew that a deer does not look for an enemy, but is guided almost entirely by scent. Had there been the least breath of air stirring the buck would have been aware of the boy's presence before reaching the bayou, or had he moved from his position the family would have soon taken to flight; as it was, however, the boy was not seen.

The deer soon returned to the bayou where in a grass-covered nook the buck slowly sank down until only his horns and nose were visible. The mother and children imitated his example. So well were they concealed that the trained eye of a hunter would never have been able to find them.

Water, we know, is a better conductor of sound than air. Martin's canoe was approaching the entrance of the bayou when the buck heard the dip of the oar. In an instant he seemed to spring from his covert and vanish like a meteor that sweeps across the winter skies, emitting a shrill, whistling noise which echoed through the woods. The others were not slow in following; not all of them, however, for Owen recovered from his surprise soon enough to kill a young one.

"What luck?" asked Martin.

"Not a single cat!"

"Well, you must have a turtle, for I heard your rifle."

"No."

"You surely didn't miss a turtle; why I never miss one, and I'm not the prize marksman of Kentucky."

"No, I didn't miss it."

"Then it sank to the bottom."

"No; guess again."

"You missed whatever you shot at."

"No; row the 'Duck' over the bayou to that clump of partridge grass and you'll find something to surprise you."

"I reckon I have it now," said Martin. "You killed a wildcat."

"Wrong again; still you are getting close to it."

"A deer?"

"That's it—a young one; it will last for a week."

"We shall make several meals on this fine fellow," affirmed Martin as he lifted the young buck from the grass and placed it in his canoe.

In the midst of such sport the pleasant summer days swiftly passed. Before July had come Owen was strong enough to attend Mass at Bellevue. So fast had been his improvement that the priest withdrew all restrictions and gave him permission to wander where he willed in the forest and marsh. By this time both boys had become expert in handling the "Duck;" with their light paddles they sent the frail canoe sailing like a thing

of life even against the swift current of the Mississippi. Each Saturday they went to Bellevue and spent the night in the company of Father Boulet and returned to Bayou Tabac on Sunday after Mass.

July passed, and the boys began to await anxiously the arrival of the captain. But just at this time something happened which turned their thoughts to still more serious matters — an event which in some respects was more exciting than the explosion which shook the hills and sealed forever the entrance to the wonderful cave on the banks of the Beech Fork River.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE GREAT EARTHQUAKE.

NEAR the bayou sat Owen and Martin. It was dusk. Not the croak of a frog was heard, not the hum of a wing, not the chirp of an insect, not the falling of a leaf, not the rustling of a bough. The trees drooped over the bayou as if seeking to lave their branches in the water, though it was too warm to give coolness and refreshment; the sky appeared washed and colorless as if the parched vegetation had drawn from it its rain-clouds and moisture; no mist arose from the river, which seemed to hold and treasure the least vaporous film. This wonted stillness of nature portended some manifestation of her mighty power. Would it be the thunder-bolt, to scathe the cypress? Would it be the hurricane, to uproot the palmetto? Would it be the mighty throe of an earthquake?

Up the hill the boys trudged slowly; Bounce followed half way, then turned and waded into the water, from which he seemed loath to depart. Not a change was observed in the water, earth, or sky. The sun set, a burning ball of copper. The night did not grow cool, the breeze sprang not up as it was wont to do; no dew

was sent from heaven to moisten the thirsty leaves of shrub or tree; the frogs forgot to croak, save at long intervals, when some monster Neptune raised his placid head above the wave to utter his warning cry of U-u-bu-ru, U-u-bu-ru! then sank into his slimy habitation. Millions of mosquitoes floated through the air; they were the only living things abroad.

Darkness came on; the heat was oppressive; the boys lay down on the couches and tried in vain to sleep.

What sound was that? the call of the night-hawk? No; nor was it wind or wave; it was scarcely audible, like the prolonged voice of a dying echo.

"Did you hear a noise?" asked Owen of his restless companion.

"No."

"I thought I heard a rumbling sound."

"There, I hear it," acknowledged Martin.

"And the earth is trembling," affirmed Owen.

The lads arose and walked out into the clearing; they spoke in whispers. The rumbling noise began again, ceased, and again was heard. Down to the bayou wandered the boys; what, was the canoe gone? Up and down the banks they wandered. The search was fruitless, the "Duck" had been washed away by the ever-rising current.

A tall cypress tree fell with a crash into the bayou, the earth trembled, the water rose and encircled the boys, who waded to the dry land and fled in terror to the cabin.

As night wore on the earth quaked, the cypress and cotton trees in the swamp opposite the hill chafed and groaned, and the current of the bayou rose until at last it formed an outlet to the west. In the dim light of awakening day the boys saw with consternation that the swamp was one vast sea, with the water covering the smaller trees and underbrush and reaching almost to the top of the outstretched branches of the tallest cypresses. But where was the skiff, the only hope of their escape if the water continued to rise?

Overhead a bob-o-link began a gladsome strain; the eastern sky was suffused with the softest of coral-pink. Daylight came. The coral-pink was changed to rose-red; the rose-red vanished, and the sky seemed a vast, burning sea of flaming scarlet. Then the scarlet clouds melted as if by magic, and in their place appeared a huge, black, awe-inspiring column. But the boys were scarcely conscious of the gorgeous panorama which had come and gone, for they were intent on recovering the canoe. There it was, lodged in the branches of a cotton tree a hundred feet away.

"Hurry, hurry on, Mart, hurry on!" called Owen to his companion, who swam across the murky bayou to get the canoe.

Martin did not answer, did not hear; the water swished and gurgled around him,—the current was far swifter than it had seemed to be when he left the shore,—the canoe twirled and shifted among the branches.

"Swim faster, faster, Mart; the canoe is getting

loose," exclaimed Owen, for Martin seemed to him to be making no progress, whereas he was straining every nerve and was cutting the water so rapidly that few swimmers would have found it possible to follow him.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" yelled Owen in triumph as Martin swung himself into the canoe and turned its prow toward the cabin.

"Fast now, Mart, fast; the wind is coming! fast! fast!"

Martin needed no encouraging words now. The huge column in the east had extended its massive bulk until the whole heavens were inky black—and the wind! how the wind howled and groaned! Pull hard, my brave lad! pull hard if you would save the canoe for yourself and Owen; pull hard if you would reach the bank; the wind is rushing madly—if it strikes the "Duck," that frail canoe will take wing and no deftness or strength of oar can guide it. Ah! he is safe.

Wind and earthquake! they came at the same instant, just as the "Duck" touched the shore. The boys cast themselves on the ground to prevent the hurricane from sweeping them into the water; even here they held their position with difficulty, clinging to roots and shrubs, and both of them holding to the rope which secured the canoe. The cotton-tree near-by was torn from its place, lifted into the air, twirled around as if it were a toy, then cast out into the stream. The whole sky seemed filled with affrighted monsters. A flock of screaming pelicans sailed past, unable to check or guide their flight. The

whole world was rushing westward to its final doom.

But in the bayou the scene was far more terrible and destructive. As the earth shook, immense holes were opened, into which the water rushed with the roar of multitudinous cataracts forming immense whirlpools into whose seething, hissing vortices were drawn whole forests of floating timber. Another flock of pelicans appeared overhead; but the hurricane cast them into the eddying pools, where they were sucked below with the driftwood and debris. It was now almost as dark as night. As the throes of nature shook the deep recesses of the swamp, great volumes of gas were liberated which as it ascended was ignited by the lightning and made the vast extent of water seem a sheet of flame; then all was dark again; then the burning marsh-gas illumined the swamp with its uncertain flickerings.

In the meanwhile the bank on which the boys were standing was gradually sinking. Step by step they retreated toward the cabin, dragging the canoe after them. It soon became evident that they must embark. Luckily the wind had almost entirely subsided; its departure had been as sudden as its coming. The whirlpools, too, no longer seethed, but there was one swift, steady current rushing on where once were the stagnant waters of the Bayou Tabac.

Firearms, cooking utensils, provisions, bedding, clothing,—all were thrown into the canoe. The two boys embarked and pulled the "Duck" out into the current. They had rowed but fifty feet, when there was an explo-

sion like the roar of thunder. The hill on which stood Bob Shocloff's cabin was rent asunder. A great rift forty feet wide and extending as far as the eye could see was made in the ridge. Through this opening a volume of mud and water was cast into the air to the height of two hundred feet; back it sank, and was heaved forth again by some mighty convulsion below — a sight truly terrible was this upheaving of the forces of nature. The boys were stricken with horror and bewilderment; unconsciously their oars dropped at their sides as they gazed upon the awful and sublime scene. Another rift was opened; into it the cabin fell with a crash; then it was lifted high into the air on the crest of a water spout; crashed again into the yawning abyss, and was seen no more.

And now the "Duck" was carried westward; brushing against the cypress trees and tearing the mossy raiment from their branches; sailing under the frail bridges of green vines, over the sunken, lilled marsh and patches of blue flag-flowers — on, on it sailed as fast as the storm-cloud which scurried overhead.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CAPTAIN LANE'S PIROGUE.

THE inhabitants of New Orleans were amazed one morning to find the large basin of the Mississippi almost entirely empty. All night long there had been a cry of alarm coming from the wharves; crowds gathered along the banks of the river, but it was only with the coming of the early light that the true nature and cause of the evil was known.

Heavy, two-masted sailing vessels from the Gulf were careened, smaller boats and pirogues were sunk deep into the mud, monster catfish and alligators were flopping in shallow pools where there was not water sufficient to support the life of a shoal of minnows. No one could explain this sudden disappearance of the vast tide of the Mississippi. Had it found another outlet to the gulf? had its sources been diverted to other directions? had it emptied its volume of water into some vast bayou? There had been a storm; a hurricane had swept over the country. There were rumors of an earthquake; some had felt the shock; some said that the end of the world was close at hand. But this one fact nobody could

doubt: the Mississippi River no longer flowed by the city of New Orleans.

In the midst of all these expressions of wonderment, — these forebodings of the near approach of the judgment, Captain Lane stood calmly surveying a pirogue which he had purchased and loaded with merchandise. On this very morning he intended to start for his Kentucky home. He, too, had many doubts and misgivings; but one thing was certain, — just as certain as the falling of the water — there lay his pirogue, half buried in the soft mud.

Farther down the river, at some distance from the shore and without its cargo, was the Woodruff, and in it Mose, who had gone there to sleep on the previous night. And horror of horrors! there before him was an alligator! There was no mistake this time — a real, live alligator! Slowly, slowly the ugly, slimy, frightful creature, with its mouth wide open, was creeping toward the raft.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HURRAH FOR THE ROLLING FORK.

TWO months had passed since the memorable earthquake in the Valley of the Mississippi River.

The time for the election of a Sheriff of Nelson County was fast approaching, and the friends of Richard Lane were growing daily more anxious, for their candidate, having left the state in May, had not returned, and no one could tell whether he was among the living. As there were rumors of a destructive earthquake and a flood which had swept away hundreds of lives, and as Mr. Lane, although due for a month, had not arrived, many concluded that he had met his fate in the terrible disaster. For weeks Squire Grundy by his untiring energy and vague promises had sustained the hopes of Lane's friends, but now even the great reputation and persuasive eloquence of the Squire could no longer support so weak a cause; the candidate was not in the field, and the people were casting around for a substitute.

In the meanwhile the opposite party, that of Will Mudd, was fast gaining ground. The Rolling Fork District, from which Mudd came, was all but unanimous for its man; Cedar Creek had been won over, and even

Coon-Hollow, which was expected to cast a solid vote for the man who had represented it at the yearly shooting-matches, was beginning to waver in its allegiance. But worst of all the enemy were about to carry the campaign into the Beech Fork settlement where their cry, "Hurrah for the Rolling Fork!" would resound and where their leader would harangue the people at the Cross-Roads, the very place and on the very day when Richard Lane had hoped to make his first political speech, a speech for which he had been preparing for six long months.

None were more interested in the results of the election than the Howards, for they were under many obligations to the Beech Fork candidate. Why had he not returned? Was it possible that he had perished in the great flood, of which there were so many conflicting tidings? And if such had been his fate had Owen and Martin lost their lives? No one could offer an explanation for so long a delay; and Bertha, with her father and mother, watched each day for the return of the boys, but each day brought only disappointment; still they watched, and prayed, and hoped.

Losing courage, Zachary Howard thought it better to withdraw Lane's name as a candidate before the day set for the speaking at the Cross-Roads; he therefore rode over to consult with Squire Grundy, and being detained for a considerable time did not reach home until late at night. Bertha and her mother were waiting for him.

"Of course there is no news from the South," said the latter despondently.

"Mr. Lane is alive."

"Then Owen is safe, and Martin, and Mose," exclaimed Bertha, clapping her hands and giving her mother a fond kiss.

"I knew that God would take care of them," added the mother as she wiped away the gathering tears.

"But how did you hear, father?" The child ran up to him, grasped his large, rough hand in both of hers and looked into his face.

"Do you remember a tall man with a long, white beard who came on the stage just before the raft started?" They could not recall this particular personage.

"His name was Cyrus Appleway," he continued, "and he met Lane in New Orleans some time after the great flood and earthquake."

"Did he see Owen and the others?" was the beseeching question of the daughter.

"Didn't hear, but Owen was certainly there. Well, this Appleway says that Lane could have been back two weeks ago; that he doesn't want to be Sheriff; that he's a coward, and not the man to be elected to such an office."

"I don't believe him," contended Bertha.

"We know that he is not a coward," alleged the mother mildly.

"I can't understand why this stranger should be

opposed to Lane," resumed the farmer; "but I'm told that he has been with Mudd's friends for a week, spoke at Coon-Hollow, and promised to appear at the Cross-Roads on Saturday. I learned this from the Squire, who knows Appleway well, having traveled with him in the stage from Louisville to Greenbrier."

When Cyrus Appleway failed in his attempt to rob the Woodruff in the Bayou Tabac he did not abandon his plan of enriching himself with the profits of the cargo. In fact his resolve became all the firmer. He was a vindictive man, one who could not forgive even an imaginary wrong; he conceived a hatred for the captain whose alertness by day and night had thwarted every design of the robber band. He followed Richard Lane to New Orleans, followed his footsteps while there, followed him on his return voyage; but nowhere did he find a chance to steal or plunder. If he could not rob he could at least take revenge for his supposed injuries; he could spread false reports about the man and defeat him in the election, and leave the state before there was time to make investigations and convict him as an accomplice in the attempted robbery of the Woodruff and for wounding Bob Shoccliff. On finding that he was popular with Mudd and the winning party, in which he would be protected, he resolved to meet Lane face to face, and if recognized as one of the robbers to deny the accusation, to insult the huge Kentuckian, to challenge him to a duel with swords in which he (Appleway), being an adept, would have a decided advantage.

While Zachary Howard was conversing with his wife and daughter about the return of the voyagers and the coming election, Aunt Margaret and Uncle Pius were in the kitchen, the former busy with her needle and the latter taking a last smoke on his cob-pipe.

Suddenly Aunt Margaret screamed aloud, Uncle Pius dropped his pipe, clasped his hands and prayed: "Lawd hab mercy on us." A huge, ugly, monster head had appeared at the door! such a head! such teeth! such eyes with empty sockets! then in jumped Mose exclaiming: "Heah's de allergader what I cotched!"

Mr. Howard, followed by his wife and Bertha, rushed in. "Heah's de allergader! heah's de allergader!" continued Mose running up to them, thrusting the hideous object into their midst, while at the same time he opened and closed the mouth, revealing two rows of long, sharp teeth.

"Where are the others?" demanded the farmer.

"Kill'd 'im all by myself."

"But Mr. Lane? the boys?"

"Dey wuzn't nowhar 'round. I seed 'im chuckin' 'round in de mud an' I jes' gibbed in at fust, den he chucked one foot in de raf', den de udder ——"

"Do tell us about Lane and the boys — where are they?"

"As I wuz sayin', dar wuzn't no wader in de ribber, — an' de allergader chucked right up on de raf' an' I chucked a rifle in his frote ——"

Mr. Howard seized the monster head which the negro

was brandishng triumphantly. "Where is Lane? where are the boys?"

"Dey's comin', but dey didn't help me to kill de all-gader."

"Where are they, Mose? Where are they now?" pleaded the affrighted Bertha, who had taken refuge behind a table.

While all were trying in vain to get some information from the excited negro in regard to the other members of the crew a stranger appeared at the door. He was of low stature, heavy-set, and dressed in a suit of black; his face was shaven, his locks fell in ringlets to his shoulders. In his countenance there was a look of supernatural joy and peace which raised him above the ordinary man.

"May I come in?" he said in a soft, sweet voice. "None of you know me, but I feel that I am in the midst of friends. I am Father Boulet, from Bellevue on the Mississippi."

"Welcome, Father; can you tell us of Lane and the boys?"

"Don't be alarmed, my children; they are safe."

"Thank God!" was the grateful response of all.

"Captain Lane is with Squire Grundy; the Squire furnished us with horses to bring us here to-night. The boys are with a certain man by the name of Haywood on the Ohio above the Wabash; we came overland by a short way, but they did not wish to abandon a fine light canoe called the 'Duck'."

"When may we expect them?" asked the mother.

"They may stay a few days with Haywood and another man, who is a great naturalist — Audubon. The two are making a collection of birds in which the youngsters are much interested. Did Mose frighten you with the head?" The priest smiled and went on to tell how the negro, on approaching the house, had ridden ahead in order to surprise the household with the specimen which he had brought all the way from the South.

On being conducted to the family room it was the pleasant task of Father Boulet to relate for his hosts the interesting story of the Woodruff; to tell of the three conspirators and Owen's protracted sickness; to describe the wonderful earthquake and the escape of the boys, who drifted westward for fifty miles over the sunken and submerged swamp; the panic at New Orleans when the bed of the river was without water; the return trip; the happy reunion of the captain and the boys at Haywood's new cabin on the bank of the Ohio. As he spoke he gesticulated vivaciously, glanced with his keen eye from one to another, and shook his long gray curls. It was past midnight when he finished his long narration, interrupted as it was by many questions, by exclamations of joy over the capture of the robbers, of pity for Owen, and of amazement at the terrible earthquake.

"But I have another item of news," said the priest as he arose to retire to his bedroom. "Three days ago I baptized Richard Lane."

A look of grateful wonderment came over all.

"It happened in this way?" continued he. "I just spoke to you about a man named Haywood, who was a Catholic but had not lived up to his duties for many years. During the return trip I often urged him to make his Confession, and while I talked to him about God and His mercy I noticed that Lane listened most intently; so I brought up the question to the latter, telling him at night when we bivouaked on the bank what we believed. Pointing to the great river, to the trees, the stars, I explained that God had made them all, that He had made us, and made us for heaven. He became interested in the subject, asking me many questions about the different religions, and finally requested me to give him the necessary instructions for Baptism."

"I reckon that is good news," said the farmer.

"Yes; he has always been a friend of ours, but now he will be doubly dear," added the wife.

"It will be a greater consolation to know that the example of the boys was the principal cause of his conversion," said the priest, "for, although the wonderful works of creation turned his thoughts to the Maker of them all, still it was the example of their lives which made him wish to belong to the same church. This Lane told me the night before his Baptism; but I have kept you all too long with my narrative."

"Oh, no! Father," protested Bertha, who had enjoyed not only the account of the trip but also the activity, grace and ardor of the speaker.

The farmer took a tallow candle and invited the priest

to come with him. On reaching the door the priest turned and said: "I did forget, I did forget to tell you why I came to Kentucky. During the night of the earthquake my church was struck by lightning and burned, and although our town was not within the submerged district we suffered so much and are so poor that we cannot build, so I have come to ask help of our brethren in Kentucky."

"We are tol'ably poor ourselves, but I reckon we will do what we can," replied the farmer.

"May we beg a blessing from you, Father?" were the gentle words of the wife.

"To bless is to be blessed: *Benedictio Dei Omnipotentis, Patris, Filii, et Spiritus Sancti, descendat super vos et maneat semper, Amen.*" The blessing was pronounced slowly and with unction, bringing peace and joy to the hearts of those who knelt.

Zachary Howard accompanied Father Boulet to his room, but he himself did not rest that night. Saddling a horse he rode to the house of Hez Rapier, and Sims, and Hill, and Boone, and Brent, and Hamilton, and Medley, and Gates, arousing each, telling them of the return of Lane, and exacting a promise to scatter the news. On the following morning horsemen were riding in every direction, heralding the important information, and urging all to attend the public speaking at the Cross-Roads.

All night long, as he passed from house to house, Farmer Howard tried to explain to himself the strange

conduct of Cyrus Appleway. This man had tried to rob the Woodruff, the fact being known to Lane, as the priest had testified that night; still Appleway had not changed his name or attempted to disguise himself on reaching the state. Did he not know that he would be recognized and arrested? What could be the cause of his animosity toward the man who had done him no wrong? Why expose himself when he could easily escape? Did he really intend to appear at the Cross-Roads, as had been announced? The more the farmer considered the matter the more he was puzzled, so he decided to ride over to Squire Grundy's to welcome the captain home, and at the same time to consult with the two about the surest way of capturing the escaped robber.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOME AT LAST.

THERE is Frisk!"

"Yes; waiting for us at the shipping-station."

"Halloo, Frisk!"

"Halloo!" repeated his young master.

"How did you know that we were coming back to-day?" asked Martin.

"Glad to see you again, old fellow," chimed in Owen.

"All well at home, I reckon," said Martin.

"Jump, Bounce; jump out and swim to meet Frisk. Jump, jump." Bounce obeyed, and soon he and Frisk were scampering up the hill in the midst of the yellow pawpaw branches.

Bayou Tabac and the Mississippi were now far away. The boys were tanned by the long exposure in the sun, and their muscles were hardened by weeks of rowing up the swift currents of the Mississippi and the Ohio; but they had enjoyed the return voyage, despite the fact that it entailed constant work. Later on they learned that their bird-dog, Frisk, had gone to the river bank each day, where he waited in patience for the return of his master, Owen.

"I wonder if they are expecting us," said Owen.

"Not to-day; but of course they know it is about time for us to come back," replied Martin.

"Yes; to-morrow will be the first of October, and we shall hear the captain make that wonderful speech."

"Halloo! there is my windmill!" shouted Owen, pointing to a miniature wheel which buzzed above an eave of the barn.

"And Old Hickory," put in Martin.

"Yes; all our old friends — everything is just as it was when we left."

The boys had met with so many strange adventures during the past five months, that they imagined the whole world had undergone a change. As they neared the house Owen gave a shrill whistle; then, receiving no answer, he called out at the top of his voice: "Mother! Bertha! we are back! safe and sound!" The boy was disappointed because both mother and sister were not standing at the door to receive him. "Uncle Pius! Aunt Margaret!" he shouted. Surely the old negroes were at home, for they were scarcely ever known to leave the premises. But not a sound could be heard.

"Perhaps they have moved," suggested Martin playfully.

"In that case," was Owen's quick reply, "they would have taken Frisk and Old Hickory."

"Where can they all be?" mused Owen as he entered the house and walked from room to room, shouting as loud as he could.

It was not unusual to leave the doors unlocked when the family was absent; but it was altogether novel to find every door standing ajar. The two boys sat down and began to think of some reason for the mysterious disappearance of the Howard family.

"I know where they are," suddenly exclaimed Martin.

"Where?"

"At a picnic."

"Nonsense! mother never goes to picnics."

"They may be at the shooting-match," ventured Martin, who was determined to find some explanation of the mystery.

"Yes," retorted Owen; "Aunt Margaret generally goes to the shooting-matches; besides, it is a month too soon for the shooting-match."

"Well, they have gone somewhere," said Martin. "You won't deny that, will you?"

"Are you sure we are not in the wrong house?" asked Owen, trying to look stupid.

The boys guessed and wondered, and wondered and guessed, and reckoned and reckoned, and wondered and guessed again. Then they concluded to go to Martin's home to see whether they could find there a solution to the riddle.

"I reckon they're all gone, too," asserted Martin as he knocked at the bolted door.

"But they didn't forget to lock up things before they went."

"No."

"What can it all mean, Mart? I believe you were right. There is a big picnic somewhere, and everybody in the country is there."

"Someone is coming down the road; perhaps he can tell us," rejoined Martin.

Riding a bareback mule without even a bridle, with only a halter to guide the animal, came a little negro boy at full speed.

"Is there a picnic anywhere to-day?" called out Martin to the little urchin.

"No, sar; not's I knows on."

"Where are you going?"

"Cross-Roads!"

"What's going on there?"

"Don't know, sar; but long on ebberbody's dar."

"Now I understand," affirmed Owen. "We are one day late in our counting; this is the day Mr. Lane is to speak at the Cross-Roads."

It took but a few minutes to saddle two horses. The boys mounted, and dashed away toward the Cross-Roads.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RICHARD LANE AT THE CROSS-ROADS.

THE eventful day of Richard Lane's first political speech had arrived; the day for which he had prepared during six long months; the day when Squire Grundy would introduce him to his admiring audience; the day when he would rival in eloquence the young orator, Henry Clay, and would gain over to his side every voter who listened to him at the Cross-Roads.

Assembled there to greet Mr. Lane was a vast crowd of every age and condition; not even the yearly shooting-matches could boast of such an attendance. There were sturdy settlers clad in suits of plain homespun and jeans and blue clouting; some with coats trimmed with rich deerskin, some with knee breeches and low shoes and large, polished buckles, while others, especially the young men and boys, tossed their caps of fox-skin with long, bushy tails dangling at one side. Women were there in great numbers, dressed in the picturesque costume of the period—the high waist and full skirt and the cumbrous old coal-skuttle bonnets with high perimeters and bright ribbons and flowers.

Just as Squire Grundy was finishing his speech the

boys galloped up to the crowd. He had harangued the country people for an hour; he had not only given the history of the United States, but had gone back to the Ark and had included a part of the history of creation; incidentally he had told his listeners to vote for Richard Lane, better known as Coon-Hollow Jim; and, finally, he narrated an incident calculated to prove that the candidate had the necessary qualifications for the important office of Sheriff of Nelson County. The incident, briefly told, is this: In arresting two stage robbers the candidate had not only shown great courage, but had also performed the wonderful feat of dodging a bullet. The Squire stated most positively that he had often seen Indians dodge bullets, but assured the audience that Richard Lane was the only white man who was ever known to imitate the red-skin warrior.

"There is the captain!" said Owen as the two boys pushed their way into the crowd.

"And we are just in time to listen to him."

"See, see! he is going to begin."

In the excitement which followed the Squire's speech only a few noticed the arrival of the boys, and these few were under the impression that Martin and Owen had accompanied Mr. Lane home from the South; they simply shook hands, therefore, and exchanged a pleasant "howdy."

Mr. Lane arose and walked forward on the platform occupied by himself and several of the prominent settlers; there he paused, bent his head, and looked to the

ground as if abashed; then slowly resumed his seat.

"He's afraid to start!" whispered Owen.

"Got the buck-scare," added an old hunter, using a term which expressed the fright of an inexperienced hunter at the first sight of a deer.

"Mudd ain't no talker, but he didn't stop 'fore he begun," put in one of the opposing party.

"He's got to speak or he don't git my vote," insisted another.

Few in the crowd could see that Mr. Lane, when he stood at the end of the platform, was conversing with someone below. And now, as soon as he resumed his seat, a venerable man slowly ascended the narrow steps to address the disappointed spectators.

A subdued laugh was heard in the crowd when he began to speak, for the ears of his audience were unaccustomed to Father Boulet's French, which was very decided; but he spoke on, and soon gained the attention of all. He assured them that it was not his intention to give a political speech; he wished to tell them of an incident which has happened in New Orleans but a few weeks previously. He had seen with his own eyes the facts which he was going to relate. After the great earthquake which had shaken the entire Mississippi Valley, New Orleans was for some hours almost entirely without water. Then it suddenly rose. Many of the boats had sunk so deep into the mud that it was impossible to raise them. On one of these boats were twenty passengers, only three of whom could swim. A

small canoe came out and rescued six; two other boats followed, and carried to the shore all but one; somebody had to remain, and this individual insisted on being the victim. The river was rising rapidly. The current was swift. It would be impossible for this last passenger to hold to the half-sunken vessel until help could be brought to him. A shout went up from the shore; someone had dived into the stream and with powerful strokes was nearing the fated ship. But could he swim in so strong a current and sustain the heavy burden of a man's body? Would both perish? The crowd along the shore watched with bated breath the two men as they sank and rose in the struggle against the raging element. For half a mile they drifted down the stream and seemed to be no closer to land than when they left the submerged ship. Then the swimmer grasped a floating log and rested as he drifted with the current. The people ran along the shore, some praying, some weeping, yelling words of encouragement. Inch by inch the rescuer fought his way, and at last deposited his burden in the midst of the cheering throng. That burden was the speaker himself, and he wished to express his gratitude to the man who saved his life. Then the priest stated why he had come to Kentucky. His little church at Bellevue had been entirely destroyed by lightning during the earthquake. He had come to ask contributions from the people of Kentucky, for he had not a cent even to begin the work. He would not demand money, he wished for contributions which they could give with

but little sacrifice to themselves — the produce of their farms — the smallest amount would be acceptable. The candidate, Mr. Richard Lane, had generously offered to construct a raft to carry the produce to New Orleans the following spring; and in honor of the builder's birthplace the raft would be called Coon Hollow.

"Hurrah for Coon-Hollow!" shouted a man from the crowd as the priest finished his speech.

"Hurrah for Coon-Hollow Jim!"

"Hurrah for Jim Lane!"

"Hurrah for Kentucky's best shooter!"

"He's goin' to git my vote!"

"I reckon he'll be elected!"

"Hurrah for the Beech Fork!"

Hurrah after hurrah rose from the tumultuous gathering as Richard Lane stepped forth to harangue the now excited throng. He began his speech before the noise had subsided; this gave him confidence; he spoke right on without a falter. He told them why he had saved the drowning man; that he would do the same as sheriff; that the people could always count on him doing his duty — rain or shine, heat or cold, danger or no danger — and so on with a series of generalities and platitudes which he had learned from Squire Grundy. But it was just such a speech as pleased the country folks gathered at the Cross-Roads. In conclusion Mr. Lane said that he wished to correct one statement of the Squire, — namely in regard to the dodging of the bullet. Had it not been for a very unfortunate delay he could

bring a witness before the crowd who would tell the story of the bullet just as it happened. Young Owen Howard was the witness, he should have returned sooner — but —

“He is here!” rang out the strong voice of Hez Rapier, who seized the lad and held him high above the crowd.

“Yes, he is here!” shouted Squire Grundy, jumping to his feet and rushing to the front of the platform. “He is here! the youngster who saw it; who saw the bullet, who saw the whole rigger-mer-role! he is here, and the speaking for to-day is over. Richard Lane has given here to-day the best speech ever given on this platform except those given by myself. All that you have got to do is to vote for him a week from to-day; to vote for him and that is all you have got to do; unless you want to come up now and shake hands with the next Sheriff of Nelson County. Come on! come and shake hands with our next Sheriff!”

In the excitement which followed, the explanation about the bullet was forgotten not only by the people but by Mr. Lane himself, who stepped from the platform and with eager glance worked his way through the crowd toward one on whom his eyes had long been riveted.

“I ’rest you for trying to murder,” said he.

“Take that for your insult!” Cyrus Appleway dealt a blow at the man who wished to seize him. To his amazement and discomfiture his powerful right arm was

grasped and held by the more powerful right hand of Richard Lane.

"I 'rest you for murder," coolly repeated the latter.

"Unhand me or you shall pay for this insult with your life!" and he emphasized the threat with an oath. As the indignant man fought and struggled to gain his liberty his left hand was also seized and held as in a vise.

"I challenge you to a duel."

"You 's my prisoner."

"I'll fight you with pistols, knives or swords."

"You 's my prisoner."

"You have no right to arrest me — you are not an officer."

"But I reckon I am goin' to hol' you until Pence comes."

"I defy you; unhand me!" With one mighty effort he freed his hands but at the same instant he was seized and laid helpless on the ground. Never before had Cyrus Appleway met his equal in strength, but he was a mere child in the powerful grasp of his Kentucky foe. He squirmed and twisted and called for help, and one of Mudd's constituents stepped forward to interfere.

"I reckon you won't," protested Zach Howard standing boldly in front of him.

"Is Pence here?" asked the captain of those nearest him.

"Pence, Pence," yelled half a dozen voices. The Deputy Sheriff, who was fast elbowing his way through

the excited crowd, was ignorant of the nature of the fight.

"I charge this man with trying to murder," said Lane to the officer.

"It is a lie!" protested Appleway.

"I 've my witnesses."

"Where?"

"Here on the grounds — Martin Cooper and Owen Howard."

Richard Lane drew forth a pistol from Appleway's pocket and handed it to the Deputy Sheriff, then releasing the prisoner he permitted him to arise. "If you try to git away, you'll go down on that ground like a shot deer," was his threat.

The two boys testified that the man before them had attempted to rob the Woodruff, and that he had fired two shots, one of which wounded Bob Shocloff.

"There is a man named Haywood, who can be summoned as a third witness," affirmed the captain.

"Cyrus Appleway," said Pence, "I hereby arrest you on the charge of attempted theft and murder."

"Hurrah for Richard Lane!" shouted Hez Rapier.

The excited, mobile crowd which had been silent in the intense interest in the contest of the giants now broke forth in wild shouts of triumph.

"Hurrah for Richard Lane!"

"Hurrah for Sheriff Lane!"

Then the opposing party made an effort to be heard.

"Hurrah for Mudd of the Rolling Fork!"

But the cries were feeble and the combination was

not harmonious, yet it gave an inspiration to Squire Grundy, who, with his deep, loud voice, shouted: "Hurrah for *the Sheriff of the Beech Fork!*"

Long and loud was the cry reëchoed.

"Let me congratulate you, Lane, not only on the speech which you made to-day, but also on the arrest of this Appleway." The man who uttered these words, while at the same time he grasped the hand of his opponent, was no other than Will Mudd. "I did not know the history of this man, or I should never have taken him into my party. I will not speak in your precinct to-day, as I hear that you do not intend to speak in mine. I'll try to win, but let us be friends."

"I reckon we'll be friends, and if I'm elected I'll make Will Mudd my deputy."

"And he'll consider it an honor," replied Mudd.

Half an hour later while Cyrus Appleway was being led a prisoner to Bardstown to await his trial he heard the prolonged shouts reëcho down the road: "Hurrah for *the Sheriff of the Beech Fork!* Hurrah for the *Sheriff of the Beech Fork!*"

CHAPTER XXX.

"SIDE BY SIDE STOOD OWEN AND MARTIN, WATCHING THE
CANOE AS IT DISAPPEARED."

IT was the day after the election. The results were still doubtful, both candidates claiming the victory. Beech Fork had gone for its representative almost to a man, but this overwhelming majority was offset by Mudd's gains not only in the Cedar Creek District, but also in Coon Hollow, where invidious tongues had alienated many friends from Richard Lane.

None were more interested in the campaign that were Owen Howard and Martin Cooper. The former had gone with his father to Bardstown, the county seat, where the votes would be added up and the results made known, but the latter had been detained at home to finish a plot of land for fall wheat. "The election news will keep, but the wheat has to be planted," was the reply of Mr. Cooper when his son wished to put off the work. As the day wore on several parties passed the field giving Martin conflicting reports. Finally as he gazed down the road he saw a horseman coming toward him at full speed. He released his hold on the plow-handle,—his heart beat fast. Yes, yes! It was Owen, riding old Hickory. High in the air the boy was waving his cap! "Hurrah for *the Sheriff of the Beech Fork*," cried the herald.

"Hurrah for Captain Lane!" was the glad response.

"The Beech Fork saved him," continued Owen, gasping for breath. "Mudd carried six precincts and Mr. Lane only five, but the Beech Fork was so solid that the Captain was elected by two hundred and twenty-seven."

"Hurrah for Mr. Lane!" yelled Martin.

"How many votes do you think Mudd got in the Beech Fork Precinct?"

"Not many, I reckon."

"Well, I reckon not; only eleven, and one of these was Mr. Lane's."

"Did the Captain carry Coon-Hollow?" asked the lad at the plow.

"Yes; but he lost a hundred votes there for some reason."

"It doesn't matter; he's elected, and now he is no longer Captain but Sheriff," replied Martin.

"*Sheriff of the Beech Fork*," said Owen. "That's what everybody called him this morning when the votes were added."

* * * * *

For a moment the boys were silent; their sports were over, the trip to New Orleans was past, the excitement of the election was gone, and now would come the days of labor on the farm.

"When does Father Boulet leave us?" asked Martin.

"He leaves us to-morrow; and that is one reason for my coming over to see you. Mr. Lane is going to make his First Holy Communion and Father Boulet is

to say a Mass of Thanksgiving. He says that we should thank God for taking such care of us during the voyage; then he wishes to thank Him for all the contributions for the new church in Bellevue."

"God certainly took care of us; I have thought of that often since our return."

"Come over to-night, Mart, and we can have our last talk with Father Boulet. Do you know what he asked father last night?"

"What?"

"He wants us to bring the raft to Bellevue next summer; the raft, you know, that Mr. Lane is going to make for him."

"Hurrah for another trip!" shouted Martin.

"He says there is no danger of my having the fever again."

"But there is one difficulty."

"What's that?"

"Why the Captain can't come with us, for he'll be Sheriff."

"We can settle that when the time comes; but be over early to-night." Owen rode away and Martin continued his work.

* * * * *

The Mass of Thanksgiving and First Communion were over, and the whole family had assembled at the shipping-station with Father Boulet. He thanked the Howards for their hospitality and the Sheriff-elect for the promised raft, and spoke of the liberality of the Kentuckians

in contributing so generously for the church in Bellevue. Before he stepped into his canoe all knelt to receive his blessing.

Father Boulet needed no one to assist him at the oar. He seated himself in the "Duck," which he had promised to take to Bob Shocloff, who was staying at Bellevue. A single stroke and the light canoe glided out beneath the overhanging sycamores. The priest smiled and bowed while those on shore waved a last farewell. Side by side stood Owen and Martin, watching the canoe as it disappeared from sight; away and away their thoughts followed it. They looked forward to the coming spring, when they would again embark and sail down the Beech Fork, down the Ohio, down the Mississippi, and would be welcomed by Father Boulet at Bellevue.

* * * * *

In the spring of 1816 the steamboat Virginia made its first trip from New Orleans to Louisville, having in tow a raft loaded with cotton for the mill at Bardstown. The owner of the mill secured a dozen wagons to bring the cotton overland from the Falls of the Ohio, beyond which neither the raft nor the steamer could pass. Owen and Martin drove their father's team, delighted at the prospect of seeing a steamboat. But it was the raft and not the boat which surprised and delighted them, for it was no other than the Woodruff; the captain of the Virginia pronounced the Woodruff the lightest and strongest raft which had reached New Orleans during the previous shipping season.

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